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**The Salvation Army and the Doctrine of Hell
A Theological Critique of the Endless Punishment of the Wicked**

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The Salvation Army and the Doctrine of Hell

A Theological Critique of the Endless Punishment of the Wicked

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Submitted for the Degree of

Doctor of Theology and Ministry

Abstract

This Research Based Thesis is a theological critique of The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell. Although it is evident that rescuing sinners from a tortuous Hell was a powerful motivation for the remarkable activism of the first generations of Salvationists, research for this thesis shows that this has been a diminishing motivational force for some decades. This thesis provides evidence of increasing discontinuity between the doctrine of endless punishment and other normative, formal, espoused and operant theological voices within The Salvation Army. There is also clear evidence of significant doctrinal development with regard to Salvationist understanding of the nature of Hell and other related issues such as the immortality of the soul. Church tradition upheld the dogma of Hell as endless punishment for many centuries whilst the streams of Scripture which postulate different futures for unrepentant humankind, such as universal reconciliation, which this thesis has found to be particularly convincing, have largely been marginalised. It now seems appropriate to attempt to find ways to recognize the veracity of the overlooked biblical alternatives, in order to allow Salvationists who are no longer persuaded with regard to the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked, the integrity of a faithful continuity between what we say we believe and what we actually believe. The conclusion of this thesis is that Salvationists should be allowed to live and work beyond the dark shadow of the weakly grounded doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked and find alternative motivations which will help fund our continued mission to speak out and live out the good news of the gospel with neighbour and nation.

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This thesis is in memory of Nicola Joy Garnham, (1957-2008) my wife, friend and mentor for thirty adventurous years. She was never persuaded with regard to the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked and before she died convinced me that I should engage in this research.

I am indebted to my supervisor Professor Oliver Davies and to Dr Anna Rowlands who supervised me in the first year. I am very grateful for their kind and conscientious supervision. I would also like to thank Salvation Army colleagues, Dr Helen Cameron, Major Dr David Taylor, Major Steve Dutfield, Major Gillian Jackson, Margot Walford, and my loving and patient wife Captain Annette Wicks, for their inspiration, wisdom and support.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to my children; Rebekah, Abigail, Hannah and Samuel. I am very aware that I would not have been able to commence or sustain this work after their mother's death without their constant love and encouragement.

Chapter 1- Introduction

This thesis is an examination of the past, present and possible future of The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell. I have been a Salvation Army officer (minister) for over thirty years and am the fourth generation of my family to belong to this denomination. I have spent most of these thirty years of ministry leading local Salvation Army congregations and for the majority of those years I have also taught doctrine, mission and New Testament studies at the William Booth College in Camberwell, where all United Kingdom officers are trained for full time ministry. In recent years I have also been studying for the degree of doctor of theology and ministry at King's College, London. As one of the requirements of this degree it was necessary to complete a ministerial focussed study. In the light of my experience of ministry and teaching I was drawn to undertake an investigation of the doctrinal belief and practice of the staff and students of the William Booth College, as well as a local Salvation Army congregation. The unexpected findings of this research which will be outlined in chapter two, have motivated me to continue to investigate the subject of Salvationist belief and practice in this thesis. Research on this issue has not been undertaken before in The Salvation Army, and in my opinion, it is overdue. The findings of my ministerial focussed study together with discussion and debate with many cohorts of student officers has convinced me to explore the possibility that there is a growing discontinuity between some of the eleven doctrines of The Salvation Army and current belief and practice. This seems to be particularly

marked with regard to the final phrase of the final doctrine which states that ‘We believe...in the endless punishment of the wicked’¹. This then is the reason that I have chosen the Salvation Army doctrine of Hell to examine, in order to establish to what extent, if any, there is discontinuity between normative doctrine and current belief and practice and how any possible discontinuity might be addressed.

As this thesis is specifically a theological critique of the doctrine of Hell, it is necessary to outline the theological framework this study will be grounded in. The long held tension between the claims of liberal and evangelical theological perspectives with regard to how Scripture is approached is relevant to this study. The Salvation Army would identify itself as a conservative evangelical denomination, and so it might be assumed that this would be the approach taken in this thesis. However, there are huge benefits of listening to a wide spectrum of scholarly insights of theologians from every perspective who help move us beyond the unproductive polarization between liberal and evangelical perspectives. Perhaps at the heart of the debate over recent centuries concerns the authority of Scripture. As a key element of this thesis will be to examine the sayings of Jesus with regard to Hell in the gospels, the question with regard to how historically reliable the various passages are must be taken into account. Since the late eighteenth century various ‘Quests’ for the historical Jesus have been undertaken utilising historical critical methods. These Quests took no account of canonical authority, or a faith perspective, but sought to discover the real Jesus of the gospels through academic, historical research. There have been various reactions to this

¹ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, (London: Salvation Books, 2010), xvi,

approach from conservative theologians and from what could be broadly labelled as the postliberal theologians. George Hunsinger, speaking of missiologist Lesslie Newbigin, comments:

Newbigin...represents what Frei meant by 'generous orthodoxy.' In a way typical of postliberal theology, he combines a high Christology with an open soteriology. The biblical witness to Jesus Christ as the world's unique and indispensable Saviour, he believes, still allows (and even requires) certain questions to remain open in hope.²

This postliberal framework, epitomised by the Yale School of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei, and especially by the theology of Karl Barth, is broadly the way the biblical material relevant to this study will be approached. This approach which understands Scripture in narrative terms, rather than propositionally, recognises the enormous value of a wide ranging academic study, whilst upholding the orthodoxy of a high Christology.

The Salvation Army has believed and taught the doctrine of Hell from its beginnings in the middle of the nineteenth century. The evangelical Christian community that gathered around the founders of The Salvation Army, Catherine and William Booth, grew rapidly and so by 1878 it was deemed necessary to draw up a foundation deed for what was then still called 'The Christian Mission':

Whereas in the year 1865 the said William Booth commenced preaching the Gospel in a tent erected in the Friends Burial Ground Thomas Street in the parish of Whitechapel in the County of Middlesex and in other places in the same neighbourhood...And whereas at the first the said Society was known by the name of the East London Revival Society and afterwards as the East London Christian Mission...And whereas the name of these united Societies was then altered to that of "The Christian Mission."

Now these present witness that for the purposes aforesaid I the said William Booth

² George Hunsinger, 2003. 'Postliberal theology' In *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, edited by Kevin Vanhoozer, 56-57. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

do hereby declare :-

Firstly: That the name style and title by which the said religious community or mission herein before described hath during the last nine years been called known and recognised as " The Christian Mission."

Secondly: That the religious doctrines professed believed and taught by the Members of the said Christian Mission are and shall for ever be as follows :-

1. We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.
2. We believe there is only one God who is infinitely perfect the Creator Preserver and Governor of all things and who is the only proper object of religious worship.
3. We believe that there are three persons in the Godhead the Father the Son and the Holy Ghost undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory.
4. We believe that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man.
5. We believe that our first parents were created in a state of innocency but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness and that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners totally depraved and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God.
6. We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.
7. We believe that repentance towards God faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and regeneration by the Holy Spirit are necessary to salvation.
8. We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself.
9. We believe that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ.
10. We believe that it is the privilege of all believers to be "wholly sanctified" and that "their whole spirit and soul and body "may" be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ "(I Thess. v. 23).
11. We believe in the immortality of the soul in the resurrection of the body in the general judgment at the end of the world in the eternal happiness of the righteous and in the endless punishment of the wicked.³

These eleven doctrines were vital elements of the founding deed of what was to become The Salvation Army. The centrality of doctrine to this emerging denomination was why the deed was couched in such extremely strong language, namely 'these doctrines are and ever shall be, professed, believed and taught'. The research for this thesis will commence with an exploration of the theological

³ Robert Sandall, *History of The Salvation Army*, volume 1 (London: T. Nelson and Sons limited, 1947), 288-289.

foundations and the operating hermeneutical assumptions which initiated the adoption of the doctrine of Hell as normative for the denomination. This will be followed by an assessment of contemporary belief and practice with reference to field research. There will then be an evaluation of theological developments within the Salvationist movement. Alternative perspectives with regard to the doctrine of Hell will then be examined, to explore to what extent The Salvation Army has ignored or excluded hermeneutical approaches which may be able to enrich and deepen our eschatological understanding and fund our motivation for mission in the twenty first century.

The particular theological framework of this thesis will be within the discipline of practical theology. What actually constitutes practical theology has been argued about and has developed in different ways in North America, continental Europe and in the United Kingdom. In general, it is agreed that practical theology can include the study of ethics, religious education, liturgical studies, pastoral studies and all aspects of ministerial training, anything in fact that relates theology to life:

Practical theology can be seen to be at some distance from the center of theological concerns. But this is to contradict the essential nature of practical theology as a theological activity. Its primary task is precisely to focus the whole theological enterprise on the demands, hopes, fears and actual practices of the community of faith so that its life in the world may be faithful to the gospel and relevant to its time.⁴

It is to be hoped that an examination of the beliefs and practice of The Salvation Army community in the United Kingdom will indeed help to enhance its relevance to these times. Practical theology as a methodology seems eminently appropriate

⁴ Paul Ballard and John Pritchard, *Practical Theology in Action: Christian Thinking in the Service of Church and Society* 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 2006), 33.

as at the heart of practical theology is rigorous and creative theological reflection. The methodologies from other disciplines such as sociology and anthropology can and have been utilised to study denominations and their practices. They have proved to be enormously fruitful dialogue partners but perhaps lack the ability to engage in the depth of theological reflection that practical theology facilitates. Churches are not simply institutions or organizations, although they can be studied at this level. They are, in fact, living Christian communities steeped in Scripture, tradition and experience of God. Practical theology emphasises the importance of paying attention to and listening to the various theological voices of the richly variant congregations which constitutes the Church. In *Talking about God in Practice* Helen Cameron speaks of the four voices of theology, all of which enhance our understanding of the enormous richness of Christian theology and practice in general:

Normative theology - Scriptures, the Creeds, official Church teaching, liturgies.

Formal theology – The theology of theologians, dialogue with other disciplines.

Espoused theology – The theology embedded within a group's articulation of its beliefs.

Operant theology – The theology embedded within the actual practices of a group⁵

This creative and valuable structure is a tool which enables researchers to engage in careful theological reflection. In addition to this reflective framework a specific methodology will need to be adopted in order to unlock reliable research findings. David Silverman defines methodology as a general approach to studying a research topic. It establishes how one will go about studying any phenomenon.⁶ According

⁵ Helen Cameron, Deborah Bhatti, Catherine Duce, James Sweeney and Clare Watkins. *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2010), 54.

⁶ David Silverman, *Interpreting Qualitative Data: Methods for Analysing Talk, Text and Interaction* (London: Sage publications Inc., 1993), 2.

to Silverman qualitative research methods include amongst others, interviewing, analysing texts, and observation.⁷ Therefore the research methods that will be utilized in this thesis will include an assessment of the survey results obtained in my ministerial focussed study and an analysis of Salvation Army normative texts. This will include engagement with a wide range of relevant historical material which will enhance the research process and make it possible to address the research questions with clarity:

The presence and significance of documentary products provides the ethnographer with a rich vein of analytic topics, as well as a valuable source of information. Such topics include: How are documents written? How are they read? Who writes them? Who reads them? For what purpose? On what occasions? With what outcomes? What is recorded? What is omitted? What is taken for granted? What does the writer seem to take for granted about the reader(s)? What do readers need to know in order to make sense of them?⁸

These analytical questions applied to the many normative texts produced by The Salvation Army will fund a rich source for investigation and theological reflection. It will also provide material with regard to such theological and ecclesiological issues as the possibility of the development of doctrine, and the nature and importance of tradition in the Church. The research for this thesis will focus particularly on The Salvation Army handbooks of doctrine which have been published periodically throughout the decades. These documents form the most significant normative, formal and espoused Salvation Army publications. Apart from the first Handbook which was written by William Booth, they have all been penned by committees of theologically respected Salvationists who will, to some extent, reflect the

⁷ Ibid.,9.

⁸ Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, 1993. 'Ethnography: Principles in Practice' In David Silverman *Interpreting Qualitative data*, 60-61.

theological climate of their times. However, nothing can be published in the name of The Salvation Army without the authority and approval of the most senior leaders of the denomination. Another rich source for investigation of possible doctrinal development is in Salvation Army hymnology. A number of official hymn books have been published over the years. These will be examined to explore any significant changes with regard to the doctrine of Hell. This textual research is undertaken in order to discover if there is any evidence that will collaborate the research findings of my ministerial focussed study. I am in a network of Salvation Army personnel undertaking doctoral research and have also searched on the British Library electronic thesis data base and have found no other research specifically in the area of belief and practice in The Salvation Army.

Chapter Two - The Salvation Army Doctrine of Hell and its Context

2.1 Historical Research

To discover the historical foundations and context of The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell, it is necessary to explore the traditions on which the Salvationist movement was built. The Salvation Army belongs to the Wesleyan family of denominations, and therefore the theology and hermeneutical approach of John Wesley has always been enormously influential. John Wesley was famously known for his phrase *homo unius libri*, a man of one book. However, his hermeneutical approach to Scripture was never narrowly fundamentalist or literalist but took account of tradition, reason and Christian experience alongside Canonical Scripture when assessing the meaning of any given text. This hermeneutical approach came to be known as the Wesleyan quadrilateral. 'Thus, we can see in Wesley a distinctive theological method, with Scripture as its pre-eminent norm but interfaced with tradition, reason and Christian experience as dynamic and interactive aids in the interpretation of the Word of God in Scripture.'⁹ It could be assumed that the Wesleyan quadrilateral would form the basis of the Salvationist hermeneutical approach to the interpretation of Scripture. However, in the founding documents of The Salvation Army this is never made explicit and it is not possible to find any consistent hermeneutical framework for the highly significant ecclesiological decisions made in those early years. It is then difficult to pinpoint what Salvation Army hermeneutical principles are, except to say that

⁹ Albert Outler 'The Wesleyan Quadrilateral.' *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 20, no. 1 (1985): 9.

it is possible to say what they are not. General Shaw Clifton, who was the worldwide leader of The Salvation Army from 2006 until 2011, writes ‘...Salvationists are bible believing Christians. We are not fundamentalists in the sense of being unthinking literalists.’¹⁰ This is clearly evident in the pragmatic hermeneutical approach the founders took with regard to some controversial theological issues in the nascent denomination. They were obviously willing to weigh various Scriptural texts in the light of their experience and their own particular logic. They are also willing to give very little weight to Church tradition, even though their own Wesleyan heritage valued Church tradition highly. One such issue was the contentious question of female ministry. A fundamentalist approach would be strongly influenced by verses of Scripture such as 1 Timothy 2:12 ‘I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she is to keep silent’ which would nullify any debate on the possibility of female ministry. However, in *Catherine Booth* John Read argues that Catherine, who was possibly the most theologically aware and reflective member of the founding group, made a successful appeal for allowing equality of ministry from the commencement of The Salvation Army.

Catherine Booth’s feminism and Salvationism were interlocked, and at the heart of both was her belief that in the restoration of the image of God to women and men in salvation the consequences of the Fall were reversed. Catherine was not simply an advocate for women’s rights to preach the gospel; in consequence of her theological convictions she was an advocate for the equality of women in all areas of life.¹¹

¹⁰ Shaw Clifton, *Who are these Salvationists?* (Alexandria: Crest Books, 1999), 27.

¹¹ John Read, *Catherine Booth: Laying the Theological Foundations of a Radical Movement* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2013), 212.

This equality stance, whilst widely accepted today, was unusual in the middle of the nineteenth century, decades before many other denominations had accepted the principle of female ministry and leadership in church life.

Another extremely controversial decision which was made by the founding group, influenced by the theology of Catherine Booth, was with regard to the non-observance of baptism and the Eucharist. An approach to baptism based on centuries of Church tradition and Scripture such as Matthew 28:19 'Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit', would indicate that continuity with the past would be the obvious hermeneutical approach. Similarly, the tradition from the commencement of the Church commemorating the Last Supper (Luke 22:7-39) and observed by almost every Christian denomination in some form, cannot easily be rejected. However, that is exactly what The Salvation Army did:

A highly capable teacher, Catherine also helped to shape Salvationist theology, including its distinctive position on the sacraments. As she argued, if all life is holy, if all of life is a visible sign of God's invisible grace, then no set observances, including baptism and the Lord's Supper, were necessary for the Christian.¹²

However inconsistently Salvationists have applied the hermeneutical principles of John Wesley, there can be no doubt that our theological foundations are Wesleyan. However, another great influence on our theological heritage was the revivalist movement that came to be termed the second evangelical awakening. General Paul Radar, who was the leader of The Salvation Army from 1994 until 1999, in his forward to Roger Green's *The Life and Ministry of William Booth*, states:

¹² Andrew Eason and Roger Green, eds. *Boundless Salvation: The Shorter Writings of William Booth* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2012), 10.

In a vital sense, the Army did not begin in Mile End Waste...The Army cannot be fully understood without coming to terms with the influences that played upon the Booths long before 1865 and the founding of the Christian mission which became The Salvation Army in 1878....The Army was born in the flames of the second evangelical awakening that swept across England and America in the mid-nineteenth century. The Booths were prominent players in that vital movement.¹³

One of the beliefs of the second evangelical awakening, was its eschatological stance known as postmillennialism. David Bosch in *Transforming Mission* says 'During the past three or more centuries Protestant missions have always revealed strong millenarian elements.'¹⁴ As General Radar states above, the Booths and the other founders of The Salvation Army were very influenced by the second evangelical awakening and especially by some of the American leaders of the revival such as Charles Finney who espoused a postmillennial eschatology. Proponents of the more pessimistic view of the millennium which is called premillennialism, teach that the world will get worse and worse until Christ returns to set up his thousand-year rule. This view can be seen as more fundamentalist and is based on verses of Scripture predicting that the Church will suffer, such as John 16:33, Acts 14:22, Romans 5:3, 1 Thessalonians 3:3, 1 John 2:18 and Revelation 1:9 as well as alternative interpretations of chapters 19 and 20 of the book of Revelation. It is very interesting that the founders of the Salvation Army chose the postmillennial hermeneutical framework for their eschatological perspective, although it was much more speculative and required a more figurative and spiritualized hermeneutical approach to the relevant passages of Scripture.

Proponents of this eschatological perspective taught that through the preaching of

¹³ Roger Green, *The Life and Ministry of William Booth Founder of The Salvation Army* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), xv.

¹⁴ David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 313.

the gospel and the reformation or Christianizing of society, a golden millennial age would eventually be ushered in, and only at the end of this thousand-year age would Christ return as Judge. They interpreted passages of Scripture such as Matthew 24:14 (And this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.) together with passages from Revelation 19 and 20 to build a hermeneutical framework which inspired enormous missionary activity in many nineteenth century evangelicals including those of the first generation of Salvationists.

Booth did hold out the hope that the message of Christ would eventually cover the entire world in a great redemptive flood, so much so that humanity would respond positively to the gospel. Such optimism was reflective of William Booth's postmillennialism. According to this theological position, the preaching of the gospel would lead to the triumph of Christianity, thereby ushering in the thousand year period of blessing and prosperity promised in Revelation 20. Only after this era of peace and righteousness would Christ return to judge humanity and establish a new heaven and earth. While conversion depended on the power of God, Christians of a postmillennial mindset sincerely believed that an ambitious program of evangelism could usher in the millennium. And none hoped for its arrival more than Booth.¹⁵

The events of history in the decades since this highly optimistic era for evangelicals in the mid to late nineteenth century, has meant the virtual obliteration of this hermeneutical framework. Evangelicals today are much more likely to be premillennial or amillennial in outlook, as are many Christians in other streams of the Church. Postmillennialism has had no place in Salvation Army teaching since the passing of the first generation, but can be seen as one of the key theological foundations which motivated the founders to engage in fervent evangelism and social reform. The Booths certainly found the motivation for their tireless mission in

¹⁵ Eason, *Boundless Salvation*, 44-45.

their eschatology and alongside postmillennialism, the other major pillar of their mission was rescuing humanity from Hell.

In the preface to his book *Hell and the Victorians* Geoffrey Rowell states:

Of all the articles of accepted Christian orthodoxy that troubled the consciences of Victorian churchmen, none caused more anxiety than the everlasting punishment of the wicked. The flames of hell illuminated vividly the tensions of an age in which men felt that old certainties were being eroded by new knowledge, and in which an optimistic faith in progress co-existed uneasily with forebodings of the consequences of increasingly rapid social change. A Bible whose Divine authority had been accepted rather than argued about was battered by the blasts of Germanic criticism and scientific theory, and the particular pattern of Christian orthodoxy which it had been assumed to uphold no longer carried conviction.¹⁶

In the midst of this uncertainty with regard to the Christian faith, the Booths began their Christian ministry completely committed to the 'old certainties' of their faith, together with an optimistic belief that they would help usher in the golden age of the millennium. In contrast to those Victorian Christians challenged by doubt in previously accepted dogma, they had a very strong conviction to reach out to the largely unchurched underclass with the Christian gospel in order to rescue them from the literal Hell of endless punishment still preached and believed by many evangelical preachers:

Though the Victorian elites no longer believed in hell, the evangelicals both believed and preached it. Charles Spurgeon's congregations heard him declare that hell was real and hot and eternal: 'Suffice it for me to close up by saying, that the hell of hells will be to thee poor sinner, the thought, that it is to be forever. Thou wilt look up there on the throne of God, and it shall be written "for ever!" When the damned jingle the burning irons of their torments, they shall say, "for ever!" When they howl, echo cries "for ever!" ... Spurgeon and the other evangelicals were hardly unaware of the denials of hell common to their age. They had seen their theology parodied in the novels of George Eliot and Charles Kingsley. They knew full well that many Victorians had transformed hell into a mere metaphor, along with its horrors.

¹⁶ Geoffrey Rowell, *Hell and the Victorians: A Study of the Nineteenth Century Theological Controversies Concerning Eternal Punishment and the Future Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), vii.

Spurgeon would not have it: Now, do not begin telling me that that is metaphorical fire: who cares for that? If a man were to threaten to give me a metaphorical blow on the head, I should care very little about it; he would be welcome to give me as many as he pleased. And what say the wicked? “We do not care about metaphorical fires.” But they are real, sir, yes, as real as yourself. There is a real fire in hell, as truly as you now have a real body, a fire exactly like that which we have on earth in everything except this, that it will not consume, though it will torture you.¹⁷

In 1865 William Booth began preaching in a disused Quaker burial ground on Mile End Waste in Whitechapel. He had remarkable evangelical success, especially amongst the poorest people of this part of London, and so began a lifelong ministry which resulted in the formation of The Salvation Army. Eric Hopkins notes the decline in church attendance during this time, especially in London. ‘The poorest working classes in London rarely attended church or chapel... Naturally strenuous attempts were made to bring the working classes back into church (though many of them had never attended there in the first place)’.¹⁸ The Booths, along with various other evangelicals like Charles Spurgeon and Charles Finney were determined to save as many as possible from the prospect of endless punishment after they died. This approach became their characteristic missional strategy and inspired many to join them. This Salvationist movement also began to work tirelessly and passionately to see the transformation of their society and eventually the whole wide world.

¹⁷ Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson eds. *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 28.

¹⁸ Eric Hopkins, *A Social History of the English Working Classes 1815-1945* (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1979), 132.

The Booths had no intention of founding a new denomination but simply hoped that any won to Christ through their evangelism would join existing churches. This proved a challenge for the new converts many of whom were unchurched and unused to the formality of the majority of local congregations they were being encouraged to join. They often felt unwelcome in the setting of formal Christian worship. Groups of the new and enthusiastic Christians, including my great grandparents, began meeting to worship and encourage one another. Gradually the underclass revivalist mission organisation developed into a Christian denomination.

There can be no doubt that from its inception, that the main purpose of The Salvation Army has been to rescue as many people as possible from a literal, tortuous Hell. When William Booth was invited to address an influential worldwide Methodist conference, one of the key elements in his speech was concerned with encouraging people to think about hell:

I was told that ninety-five in every hundred of the population of our larger towns and cities never crossed the threshold of any place of worship, and I thought, cannot something be done to reach these people with the Gospel? It seemed to me that if we could get them to think about Hell they would be certain to want to turn from it... I resolved to try¹⁹

The motivation for this strident evangelism was a deep love for family, friends, neighbours, communities and nations, who, according to their theological framework, would spend eternity in Hell unless they received the salvation offered by Christ. Working amongst the poorest communities in society inevitably led to engagement in social and humanitarian issues, the 'hell on earth' that so many experienced, but the main purpose was always to save as many as possible from an

¹⁹ George Railton, *General William Booth* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1912), 75-76.

endless punishment. In the New Year address to his officers in 1883, William Booth outlined very clearly what the purpose of The Salvation Army was and should continue to be:

Do plenty of straight, red hot firing out of doors. Not merely testimonies, but preach the terrible character of sin with its dreadful penalties. Preach hell; you cannot very well preach too much of hell if you do it with a broken heart and compassionate lips. Yearn over the people. Weep over them as Christ did over Jerusalem, and then talk to them of the destruction that is coming. Picture the judgment day. Talk about the blighting, damning influence they are exercising on those about them, and then preach Calvary, the open arms and pleading heart, and home of love ready to receive them. Proclaim the universal love of God for the worst of sinners. Always offer salvation on the spot. Get penitents into your open air ranks if you can. Get penitent forms at the corners of the streets, in the market squares, and on the camp grounds where we assemble; then The Salvation Army will begin to make real and rapid strides towards the subjection of the people. On your return marches to the barracks, throw off skirmishers, who shall lay hold of the stragglers, take them by the arm, and bring them with you. Tell them they will be welcome, put them in a seat, find them a book, take notice of them, treat them, men and women, as your equals. Especially watch round the doors. Many a man comes up with the procession, looks lingeringly into the hall, and then retires, perhaps to the public house, or to join the roughs in mocking outside, who would have gladly come in had he been invited with such a word. Watch for souls.²⁰

It seems from this New Year message and from many other writings that The Salvation Army was formed to ‘preach Hell’ and ‘proclaim the universal love of God for the worst of sinners’ and ‘offer salvation on the spot’.²¹ This approach, influenced by the theology of John Wesley, and the postmillennialism typical of the second evangelical awakening, reveals the theological foundations of The Salvation Army.

The latest Salvation Army *Handbook of Doctrine* (2010) adds to this understanding by recognising that the primary doctrinal roots of The Salvation Army are in the classical creeds:

²⁰ Eason, *Boundless Salvation*, 194-195.

²¹ Ibid.

Three creeds dating from the early centuries of Christian faith, the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Athanasian Creed, have become known as the classical creeds. In due course further creedal statements, which often identify the doctrinal emphases of particular church groupings, have come into being. Examples of these are the Westminster Confession, which is still regarded as definitive in Presbyterian Churches, and the Augustana, which from the time of the Reformation has marked the distinctive tenets of Lutheranism. Our Salvation Army Articles of Faith fulfil a similar function. While their origin is nowhere stated, their roots are clearly in the Wesleyan tradition. The articles bear a striking similarity in words and content to Methodist New Connexion doctrines, which can be traced back to 1838. William Booth was an ordained minister of the New Connexion, whose founders claimed their doctrines to be 'those of Methodism, as taught by Mr Wesley'... Our doctrinal statement, then, derives from the teaching of John Wesley and the evangelical awakening of the 18th and 19th centuries.²²

In 1855 William Booth became a minister in the Methodist New Connexion, which was one of the Methodist denominations formed after John Wesley's death.

William Booth was a very effective evangelist, but the New Connexion were keen for him to minister to a settled congregation and so inevitably tensions grew and he eventually resigned. When he commenced his independent ministry in 1865, he simply took the doctrines of the New Connexion with him. It would appear that the first generation of Salvationists were more passionate about saving the lost than engaging in deep theological reflection with regard to the doctrinal stance of their new denomination. They must have believed the New Connexion doctrines or they would not have embraced them for their new movement. The wording of the New Connexion statement of faith with regard to its doctrine of Hell, is utilised with no alterations at all and therefore The Salvation Army became a denomination that believed in, taught and preached that the wicked would be punished endlessly in Hell.

²² The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine* 2010, xviii.

2.2 Fieldwork Research

As has been established above, belief in the literal reality of Hell was one of the central eschatological convictions that motivated the first generation of Salvationists to engage in tireless, sacrificial mission. Over recent years I have become suspicious that there is an increasing discontinuity between the normative doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked and the everyday espoused and operant theology of some Salvationists. In *Practical Theology in Action*, Paul Ballard and John Pritchard outline the complex relationship between faith, practice and social reality for a study such as this:

Since the church's life and action is related not only to its self understanding and comprehension of its faith, but also to the changing society in which it functions, practical theology is triadic, concerned with the inter relationship of faith, practice and social reality and is aware that the lines of force flow in both directions.²³

Twenty first century society is vastly different from the mid nineteenth century when the Booths began their ministry. The complex relationship between denominational loyalty, an ever changing society and contemporary belief and practice seemed to be an area that would benefit from research, in order to unearth the theological, historical and cultural reasons for any discontinuity between normative doctrine and current faith and practice:

Practices, then, contain values, beliefs, theologies and other assumptions which, for the most part, go unnoticed until they are complexified and brought to our notice through the process of theological reflection. Importantly, practices are also the bearers of traditions and histories. They are not therefore simply individual actions. Rather they are communal activities that have developed within communities over extended periods of time. Even though they may be manifested in particular instances, Christian practices always relate to particular communities; communities

²³ Ballard, *Practical Theology in Action*, 20-21.

with specific histories and traditions which give meaning, value and direction to the particular forms of practice.²⁴

A requirement of the ministerial focussed study element of this doctorate was to undertake fieldwork research relevant to the student's ministry. The main context of my ministry and the community which I decided to research was the William Booth College. Each September a new group of students arrive for a two-year residential course. There are usually about thirty people from all walks of life and nationalities. It is the richness of college life, steeped in theological discussion and debate with fellow officers, and students, which led me to research doctrinal belief and specifically to conduct a survey on faith and practice in The Salvation Army.

I chose to design a questionnaire (Appendix 1²⁵) based on each phrase of our articles of faith. The eleven doctrines of The Salvation Army actually contain these eighteen doctrinal statements:

We believe...

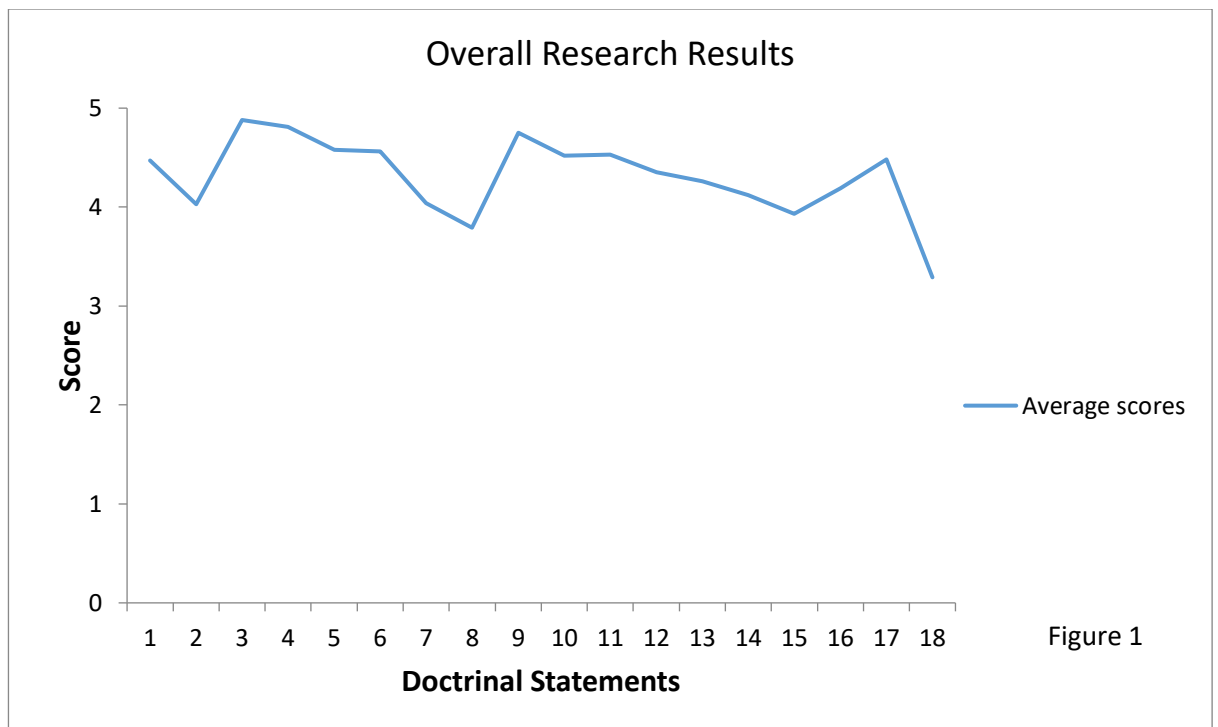
1. that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God
2. that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice
3. there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things
4. who is the only proper object of religious worship
5. that there are three persons in the Godhead-the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory
6. that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man

²⁴ John Swinton and Harriott Mowat, *Practical theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 20-21.

²⁵ Appendix 1. A Questionnaire on Belief and Practice in the Salvation Army, 165.

7. that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness
8. that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God
9. that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved
10. that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation
11. that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself
12. that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ
13. that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ
14. In the immortality of the soul
15. In the resurrection of the body
16. In the general judgment at the end of the world
17. In the eternal happiness of the righteous
18. In the endless punishment of the wicked

Using the questionnaire, I surveyed officers, students and local congregation members, asking them to rate each of the eighteen statements on a scale of 0 to 5 (0=do not believe at all, no influence on Christian practice 5=strongly believe, strongly influential on Christian practice) with regard to their belief in Salvation Army doctrine and the influence that these eighteen doctrinal statements have on their Christian practice. I did this in order to discover if there was a pattern with regard to which doctrinal statements were most believed and least believed, and which doctrines had most influence and least influence on Christian practice. Figure one illustrates that there was a clear pattern amongst the respondents:



There were sixty-two respondents to my questionnaire and perhaps the most unexpected result was the remarkably consistent pattern amongst all those taking part as to which doctrinal statements scored high and low both with regard to belief and practice. Whatever is happening in The Salvation Army with regard to faith and practice, it seems that it is impacting this faith community in a more consistent way than I suspected. This pattern was remarkably similar regardless of gender, age, officer, student or lay Salvationist, or length of time the respondent has belonged to The Salvation Army. Overall the most believed and the most influential on practice was the second doctrine 'We believe there is only one God who is infinitely perfect...' The least believed and the least influential on practice of the doctrinal statements was the one with regard to the doctrine of Hell, 'we believe... in the endless punishment of the wicked'. This eighteenth statement

scored lowest of all the doctrinal statements in all of the groups questioned.

However, the lowest score of all for this statement amongst the groups was for the teaching staff of the William Booth College. (Appendix 2.²⁶) The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell is little believed and has a very low impact on Christian practice for the majority of the staff, all of whom have been theologically educated. As more and more Salvationists in this postmodern culture question belief and reflection on the terrible nature of Hell as presented in our doctrine, it is likely that this strong tenet of belief, largely unchallenged by earlier generations of Salvationists, will be questioned and critiqued. This striking fact, with regard to the belief and practice of the staff concerning Hell which showed up so clearly on the graph I produced from the statistics gathered in my fieldwork shown in appendix 2, was one of the main reasons that I decided to explore The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell in this thesis.

The second least believed and least influential doctrinal statement was 'We believe that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God'. The concepts of the endless punishment of the wicked, of total depravity and the wrath of God may be expected to be unpopular beliefs in the general population of the United Kingdom. However, I would suggest that it is a surprising result for a denomination which has always had a strong sense of identity and loyalty with eleven doctrines at its normative centre.

²⁶ Appendix 2. Graph Indicating Belief in the 18 Doctrinal Statements amongst Students, Staff and Congregation Members, 167.

It is these somewhat unexpected findings that has provoked me to pursue this issue in this thesis as it challenges the very *raison d'être* of the Salvationist movement.

The first generations of Salvationists believed this doctrine and were driven to radical and selfless Christian action by the strong conviction that they were rescuing people from a terrible, torturous, literal Hell. Thomas Allin and Mark Chamberlain in *Every Knee Shall Bow*²⁷ emphasise the challenging psychological and spiritual dilemma there must be for practice to match belief amongst those who steadfastly believe in the endless punishment of the wicked:

No one lives as if he really believes that all around him are millions of people heading for eternal hell without a chance of escape without hearing and accepting the message that he possesses! It is impossible! Who would dare so much as to smile if he really believed that a member of his household was headed for a place of unending, unspeakable anguish and pain? Marriage would be a crime; every birth would be an occasion of awful dread. It is positively immoral to bring a new life into the world if you believed that child could possibly end up being tortured forever! To perpetuate the human race would be to perpetuate endless misery for millions of souls. If people really believed in everlasting hell, the world would be a madhouse!²⁸

Allin and Chamberlain in this unambiguous quote, highlight what seems to reflect the view of many Christians, including an increasing number of Salvationists. This is the substantial difference between Salvationists today and our forebears. From examining early Salvationist literature, the first generations of Salvationists did seem to manage the 'impossibility' of matching belief and practice with regard to this doctrine.

The survey on belief and practice provides evidence of discontinuity between the normative theology of the denomination and the operant theology of members.

²⁷ Thomas Allin and Mark Chamberlain, *Every Knee Shall Bow* (Camarillo: Xuion Press, 2005)

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

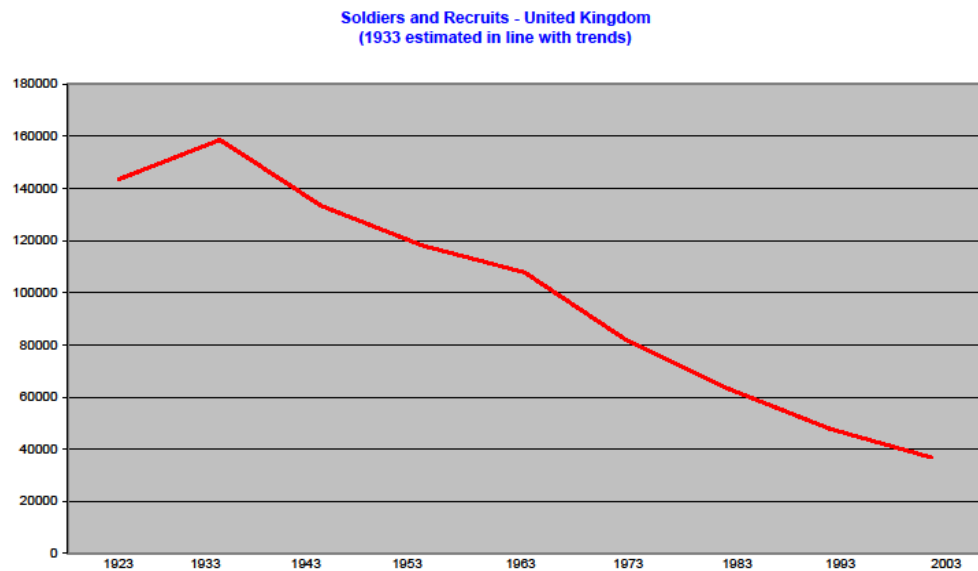
These research findings provided by the fieldwork results will now be tested to ascertain if corroborative evidence of discontinuity can be found from other statistical and textual research.

2.3 Statistical Research

In 1878 the year that The Christian Mission changed its name to The Salvation Army, it is recorded²⁹ that there were 50 congregations and 88 full time officers in the movement. By 1888 there were 2,413 congregations and 6,391 full time officers. As well as providing evidence of remarkable growth in the first decade of The Salvation Army, these figures also indicates that from its commencement the leaders of the movement were conscientious with regard to recording statistical information. This means that for research purposes there is an accurate picture of the numerical strength of The Salvation Army over the decades. Figure two is taken from officially published Salvation Army United Kingdom statistics and indicates a continuing downward trajectory in membership since the 1930's:

²⁹ Eason, *Boundless Salvation*, 20.

Figure 2



Like many other denominations The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom has been in decline for decades. This statistical evidence of decline since its zenith in the early 1930's, is a constant concern to Salvation Army leaders but no idea or action has ever halted this steady decline. If rescuing people from endless punishment after death and a postmillennial eschatology energised the early Salvation Army into enthusiastic evangelism, then this decline in membership also indicates a decline in a commitment to postmillennialism and the doctrine of Hell. It cannot be claimed that this decline in membership is solely due to the change in belief and practice but the argument is made here that it is a factor. There can be

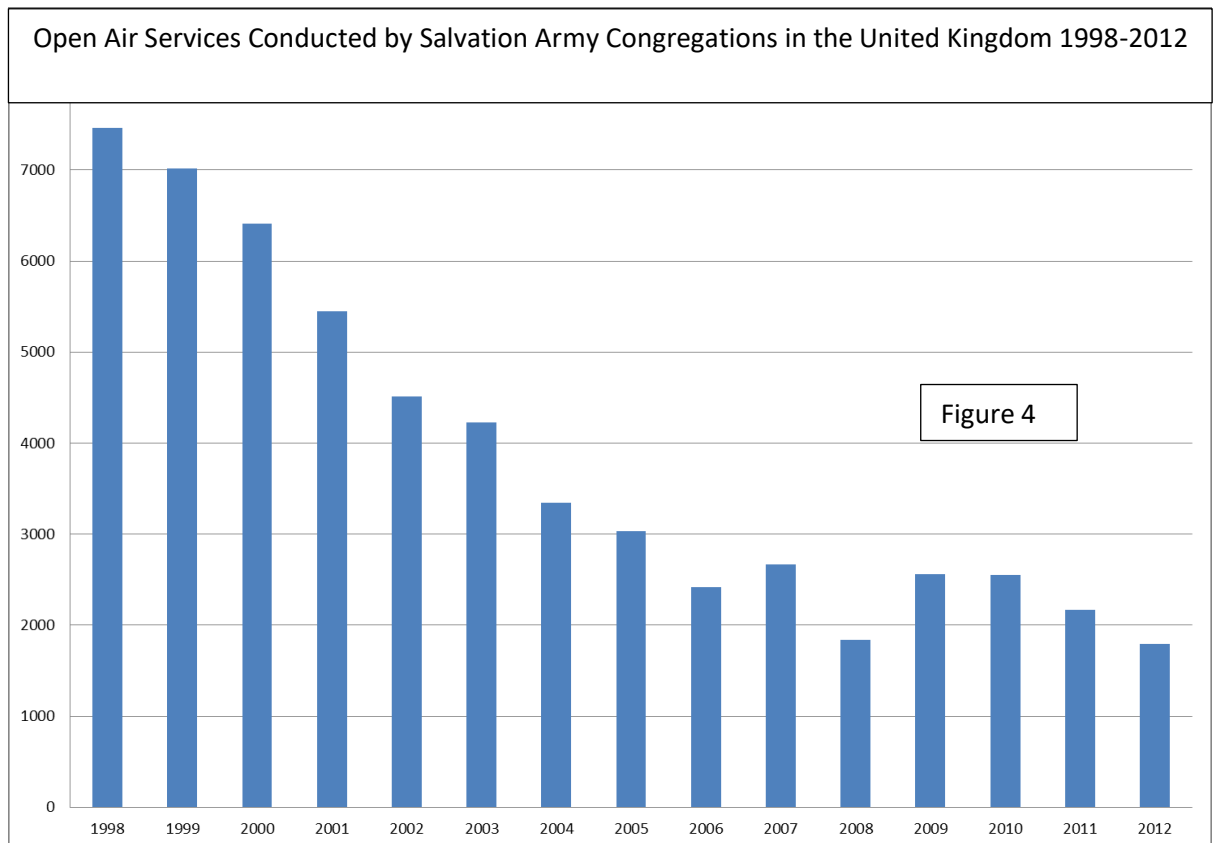
no doubt that earlier generations of Salvationists were generally more aggressive with regard to evangelism and recruitment. As this fervent evangelism diminished it is likely to have contributed to the loss of membership. There will of course be other cultural and sociological factors to consider with regard to attendance and membership of many Christian denominations. It could be argued however, that the decline in Salvation Army membership indicates that we have become a more settled, less energized denomination than was the case in the first generation.

Other streams such as those in the Pentecostal movement, which commenced soon after The Salvation Army and also have their roots in the evangelical awakening, do seem to be able to continue to grow. Not only has membership been in decline in The Salvation Army but attendance at Sunday services has diminished considerably as can be seen from figure three:

The Salvation Army United Kingdom - Some Comparisons of Membership and Attendance		
	1924	2004
Sunday Morning Total Attendance (per week)	155,876	33,629
Sunday Evening Total Attendance (per week)	157,227	18,384
Adult membership	150,931	36,318
Junior membership	44,346	6,262
Figure 3		

These sample statistics which are comparisons between 1924 and 2004, indicate a dramatic decline in attendance at Sunday evening services. This is particularly significant as in Salvation Army tradition the Sunday evening service has always been evangelistic and called 'the salvation meeting'. Sunday morning services are

still called 'the holiness meeting' and are quieter, more reflective teaching meetings for discipleship training focussed on committed Salvationists. The Sunday evening Salvation meeting is an evangelistic, often lively meeting that Salvationists are expected to invite their friends and neighbours to. During all of my childhood and early adult life, the salvation meeting was always the best attended and most exciting gathering of the day. We would have an open-air service in the town centre in the early evening and then encourage as many as we could to follow the brass band as it marched back to The Salvation Army hall for a very energetic evangelistic meeting. There are obviously sociological factors at play in the decline represented in these statistics. The average home is much more comfortable now than in former generations. The advent of central heating and television means that many people today would prefer not to go out and listen to evangelistic preaching and a brass band on a cold Sunday evening. For whatever other reasons Sunday evening attendance has fallen so much, it can be argued that these statistics indicate a decline in evangelistic passion amongst Salvationists, a passion that was the hallmark of earlier generations. There are no replacement evangelistic gatherings evident in any Salvation Army statistics and so this must lead to the conclusion that these meetings are in fairly dramatic decline. The equally evident decline in membership indicates that Salvationists are not recruiting their friends and neighbours on a personal level as once they did.



Similarly, there has been a marked decline in local congregations holding open-air services. Figure four indicates the statistics for the years from 1998 to 2012 (the only ones which could be found) and represent a dramatic decline from earlier generations when a thousand congregations would hold two or three open air services nearly every Sunday of the year in the United Kingdom. Although I am unable to locate actual statistics, a conservative estimate would be that in the 1920's to 1950's there would be at least 80,000 open air evangelistic meetings held by The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom every year. William Booth, influenced by the tactics of John Wesley, was passionate about going where the people were rather than waiting for them to come to church. This was a fundamental element of the ethos of the first generations of Salvationists and has lasted until fairly recent decades. As well as attending indoor services at The Salvation Army with my family

every Sunday during my childhood, I have vivid memories of watching my father play in our local Salvation Army brass band in open air services. My family usually attended up to three outdoor services every Sunday, although we did not go if it was raining:

When the General began to form his Army, it was ordinarily assumed as a settled principle that Open-Air Work could only be done in fine weather, and the theory is still existent in many quarters. As if the comfort and convenience of "the workers," and not the danger and misery of the people, were to fix the times of such effort!³⁰

During the time of my grandparents and parents it gradually became the convenience of the 'workers' and not the danger and misery of the people that seemed to drive missional activity. Open air services had become established, formal elements of Sunday routine and were cancelled if it was raining. For the Salvationists that I grew up with it was simply what we did on a Sunday rather than a conscious gathering of passionate evangelists rescuing as many as possible from Hell at any cost or inconvenience. The contrast between this and the earlier generations is illustrated very well with an illuminating anecdote which Roy Hattersley uses to introduce his biography of William and Catherine Booth:

On the 17th of January 1885, the *Times* published a letter from the Reverend J. Hector Courcelles MA which described the horrors of a railway journey between Richmond and Notting Hill. 'In the neighbouring compartments' Mr Courcelles wrote, 'there were some officers of The Salvation Army. One of them rose and in violent language, began to address us on the most solemn of subjects.' Worse was to come. 'As the train stopped at Latimer station, there was another train on the up line and into the window of this, our zealous friends shouted, 'You will all rot in hell.' The letter ended on a plaintive note. 'Should not the railway companies protect their passengers from this sort of behaviour?'³¹

³⁰ Railton, *General Booth*, 53-54.

³¹ Roy Hattersley, *Blood and Fire: William and Catherine Booth and their Salvation Army* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1999), 1.

A fervent belief in the reality of the endless punishment of the wicked and a strong compassion for 'the lost' was a powerful motivation for aggressive evangelism which led the early Salvationists to live to rescue as many as possible from Hell. The evidence above points to the likelihood that the lack of aggressive evangelism in recent decades is at least in part due to a loss of belief in the reality of a literal Hell.

Along with a decline in membership, attendance at meetings (Sunday services) and open air evangelistic services there has also been a decline in preaching with regard to the subject of Hell. Although empirical statistical evidence for this cannot be found, the anecdotal evidence is strong. The teaching staff at the William Booth College regularly attend Salvation Army Sunday services to listen and critique the preaching of our students, who have chosen their own topics and texts for preaching. In the considerable number of years I have been doing this I have never heard a sermon on Hell and my colleagues at the William Booth College tell the same story. I have also made a point of asking fellow Salvation Amy officers about their experience of the preaching of Hell and it is very rare indeed that they have ever preached a sermon on this subject or heard anyone else preach one. I have conducted and attended many Salvation Army funerals in over thirty years of ministry. Salvation Army officers are quite often asked to conduct funerals for people who are not members but have some attachment or connection, such as residents in Salvation Army homeless hostels. Many of these people would not be regular church attenders or consider themselves committed Christians but in all such funerals that I have attended I have never heard even a hint of the possibility of Hell for the deceased. The departed are always committed with dignity and

respect to the love and mercy of God. I cannot imagine this being the case in the earliest generations of the Salvationist movement. As Alister McGrath comments with regard to the wider Church:

There has been a perceptible loss of interest in the idea of hell in both popular and more academic Christian circles. Evangelistic preaching now seems to concentrate upon the positive affirmation of the love of God, rather than on the negative implications of the rejection of that love.³²

If the endless punishment of the wicked were still a vital element in the theological framework of present and future leaders of Salvation Army congregations it is significant that there is such a silence on this subject in the preaching of recent generations. The silence with regard preaching on the Hell passages of the Bible is [corroborative](#) evidence that there is discontinuity between the long-established orthodoxy and orthopraxy of The Salvation Army and current belief and practice with regard to the traditional doctrine of Hell. In addition to the empirical, statistical and anecdotal evidence of a change in belief and practice with regard to the doctrine of Hell, there is also considerable textual support.

2.4 Textual Research

There have been a number of editions of handbooks of doctrine during the history of The Salvation Army. They have been published in order to provide clarification and an expanded explanation of the eleven articles of faith. As they have all been published by The Salvation Army they come within the normative theological framework for our denomination. The first handbook was a small doctrine book written by William Booth in 1893 for people training to be Salvation Army officers.

³² Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1994), 474-475.

In the last section there is a completely unequivocal statement written in question and answer style with regard to the nature of Hell:

Do you believe in Hell? "yes all the time" What do you understand by Hell? "The place of punishment into which God consigns the wicked after death" Will this punishment last forever? "yes, for ever" Are there not some who deny the unending character of this punishment? "Yes; two different denials are given." What are they? "One class of people believe that though men are sent to Hell at death, or some time after death, yet that the punishment has such a reforming effect upon them that they get saved in Hell, and made fit for heaven, and in the end are taken there; so that at last the Devil and all the lost souls meet with the unfallen angels and the blood-washed saints before the throne. This is called the restoration theory...What is the other view which denies that the punishment of Hell is everlasting? The other class of objectors say that after a certain period of punishment, the soul is annihilated-that is, destroyed." Is not this doctrine false? "Yes, decidedly." But how can you prove the punishment of Hell lasts forever? "Because all orthodox Christians-that is, those who really believe in the Godhead and Atonement of Jesus Christ-have always believed so; and we do not think that the Holy Spirit, whose business it is to keep the church of God right in doctrine, would have allowed them to be in error all this time on a subject so important." What other arguments have you for this doctrine? "Because it is a plain doctrine of the Bible"³³

It is clear from this document that, for the primitive Salvation Army, Hell was in no sense metaphorical nor anything other than a literal, endless punishment of the wicked. There was no room for any alternative interpretation for the first generation of Salvationists in this quasi-military, autocratic organisation where leaders were to be obeyed. Eric Reitan in his chapter in *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate* makes a distinction between what he calls the classical view of Hell and the progressive view:

In brief, the classical understanding is that the sufferings of the damned are imposed upon them by God, against their will as a just punishment for sin. They languish in Hell, not because they have chosen to suffer in this way, but because they deserve

³³ William Booth, *The Doctrines of The Salvation Army Prepared for the Training Homes* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1893), 100-101.

it. The progressive understanding, which typically takes its cue from an Arminian approach to theology, hold two things: first, that the sufferings of the damned are nothing but those that necessarily attend the state of alienation from God; second, that this state results entirely because of the free choices of the damned. On this view, God sincerely wills the salvation of all, even the most underserving of sinners, but his will is blocked by the free choices of the creature. While he surely could override their freedom, he does not do so, out of respect for their freedom.³⁴

Reitan goes on in this appropriately named chapter *Human Freedom and the Impossibility of Eternal Damnation*, to make a closely argued and persuasive case against both the classical and progressive understandings of Hell. In reference to the progressive view of Hell, in which the reprobate freely chooses separation from God, he argues:

Just as the alcoholics who hit bottom can no longer tell themselves that alcohol makes their lives better, neither can sinners who come face to face with the utter anguish of alienation from God continue to insist that such alienation is preferable to God's loving embrace.³⁵

Perhaps not every Salvationist would be convinced by Reitan's case for the impossibility of damnation, but at least many will be on the journey from the traditional, classical view to the progressive view of Hell. It is very significant to this study that the various handbooks of doctrine, all reflect this journey. By the time of the publication of the 1922 Handbook of Doctrine, there was an acknowledgement that some of the biblical descriptions of Hell could be figurative. The original intention of the foundation deed was that the articles of faith would be unalterable yet by the 1920s it is clear that a more progressive alternative to the literal understanding of the terror of the Hell passages was beginning to be recognised, if

³⁴ Reitan, Eric. 2003. 'Human Freedom and the Impossibility of Eternal Damnation' In *Universal Salvation? The Current Debate*, edited by Robin Parry and Christopher Partridge, 125-126. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.

³⁵ Ibid., 130.

not wholeheartedly endorsed. The 1922 Handbook of Doctrine could not possibly have been published without the authority of the General, who by then was William's eldest son Bramwell. It represented the normative theological text of official teaching for the denomination and yet was very different from the strident tone of the earlier editions of the Handbook:

1. Hell is the place or state of final punishment of the wicked; that is those who die in their sins.
2. The Bible shows that the punishment of the wicked will be terrible; for although some of its descriptions may be figurative, they indicate a dreadful reality.
 - (a) Words commonly used for the doom of the wicked are *destruction, perdition, perish, lost*; all of which imply utter and hopeless ruin.
3. The punishment thus referred to will last forever.
 - (a) The Bible definitely declares that the punishment of the wicked will be 'everlasting' 'eternal', 'forever', 'for ever and ever'...
 - (d) The Bible in describing the doom of the wicked by such terms as 'death', 'destruction', 'perishing', being 'burned', provides no grounds for supposing that the wicked will be finally annihilated. These terms are figurative, and the Bible never uses them as implying cessation of existence.³⁶

By the time the 1969 Handbook of Doctrine is published there is no longer a section devoted to Hell but simply a subsection in the chapter on the eleventh doctrine. This chapter covers the immortality of the soul, the resurrection of the body as well as Heaven and Hell. There is more theological understanding in the 1969 edition and the language is described as 'largely figurative' including the use of the word *gehenna* most often translated Hell in English translations of the New Testament:

1. The endless punishment of the wicked is that they are banished from the presence of God.
2. The suffering and loss involved in this separation is spoken of in many ways

³⁶ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1922), 159-160.

Again the language is largely figurative, but again the reality is greater than the symbol...The distinctive word '*gehenna*' in the New Testament used to describe the place of final punishment, is itself a symbolic form of speech and refers to the valley of Hinnom...This geographical allusion is saying that the most solemn realities in the life to come answer to these ideas symbolically presented.

3. Banishment from God is the most serious form of condemnation. This is described as the second death, the culmination of the separation from God which began on earth, and is the opposite of life or eternal life that the Lord Jesus Christ imparts to those who accept Him as Saviour.³⁷

It is significant that in this handbook of doctrine the favoured term for punishment after death is the much more progressive word 'banishment'. This word is equated with the second death, surely opening up the possibility that Salvationists could interpret endless punishment in terms of annihilation, especially as the handbook states that this banishment 'is the opposite of life or eternal life'.³⁸

In 1998 a new handbook was published entitled *Salvation Story*, in the foreword

General Paul Rader states:

Salvation Story puts us all into the flow of what God has been doing across the centuries for the salvation of the world. It is our story. For we believe that God raised up The Salvation Army as part of his program, born of love from all eternity, to heal and restore a broken humanity and draw it back into fellowship with himself.³⁹

This positive view of the plan of salvation is very different in its language and emphasis from much of the theology of earlier handbooks even if the basic Arminian framework is the same. The idea of 'the flow of what God has been doing across the centuries' in the quote above is very much more in line with the radical insights of Karl Barth and others. They developed the theological framework of *Missio Dei*, with great weight given to the creative action of the Trinitarian God as

³⁷ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1969), 176-177.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Story* (London: The Salvation Army International Headquarters, 1998), xi.

prime missionary in the world. General Rader's appreciation of this idea is very different from earlier leaders who constantly stirred up Salvationists to participate in fervent evangelism because the lost would not be saved from Hell without our tireless effort. In *Salvation Story* General Radar goes on to say:

We can rest with assurance in the mercy of God, as well as in his absolute justice. We cannot dictate to God who will be saved and who not. But we can trust to the judgement of God the lives of all those whose life and experience, personal creed and spiritual opportunities are different from our own because he is the loving creator of all. ⁴⁰

The 2010 edition of the *Handbook of Doctrine* was compiled by the current International Doctrine Council, a group of officers from all around the world with theological expertise. This handbook is the most progressive and represents a distinct discontinuity with the classical doctrine of endless punishment. Thus the 2010 Handbook states:

Hell and Heaven

To believe in judgment is to accept the reality of Hell and Heaven. Biblical pictures of Hell are terrifying and vivid and remind us that to choose to reject the grace of God must issue in a separation from him that reaches into eternity (Matthew 13:24-30). Ultimately, our God-given freedom includes the freedom to make choices with eternal consequences (Matthew 25:1-13; 31-46). As Hell refers to the anguish of those who face eternity without God, so Heaven describes the bliss of those who enjoy the full experience of his presence. Biblical references to Heaven and Hell are only faint glimpses of the greater realities, of the final abode of the saved and the lost (Mark 9: 42-48; 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10; 2 Peter 3:8-13).

A hope to be shared

Christian life is marked by a hope that reaches beyond this life to life with God in his eternity. It is a life of joy in the presence of Christ, anticipating the life to come. It is a life of trust, full of confidence in the ultimate purposes of God in Christ. For us, the future hope is already part of the present, as the Holy Spirit brings to us the living Christ who makes his Kingdom a present reality. As we live out this future today we invite others to share in our hope. Doctrine 11 summarises the final consequences of the choices we make in relation to God and the atonement offered by Jesus Christ. The beliefs we hold concerning last things are based on God's justice and on his love, as these have been revealed through Jesus Christ and through the biblical message. This includes Christ's return in glory, the completion of God's Kingdom, the resurrection of the body, the final accountability of all persons to God, the endless

⁴⁰ Ibid., 120.

despair of those who reject salvation and the eternal happiness of those who are righteous through faith.⁴¹

It is significant that according to the index, this is the only reference to Hell in the entire 2010 *Handbook of Doctrine*.⁴² The doctrinal development from the first Handbook of Doctrine which stated that Hell was 'The place of punishment into which God consigns the wicked after death'⁴³ is notable. The progressive view of Hell eliminates many of the problems with regard to the nature of God that the classical doctrine raises. However, the progressive view, as presented in the 2010 handbook, still presents the idea that some people, of their own volition, will choose to experience eternal anguish rather than bliss. At least in this view there is an openness to the idea that Hell is an eternal separation from God rather than a specific place of conscious punishment. This perhaps allows the possibility of an annihilationist interpretation of this doctrine, although their use of 'endless despair', rather than 'endless punishment', indicates that the Doctrine Council believes in the continued existence of the wicked, whilst annihilationists interpret the punishment of the wicked as being complete and everlasting annihilation.

Since the publication of the latest *Handbook of Doctrine* in 2010 the International Doctrine Council has convened an International Symposium on Doctrine, theology and ethics which took place in October 2014. For a denomination not known for its interest in theology, this was most welcome. An invited number of Salvationists, most of whom are officers, were asked to present papers on various topics. This

⁴¹ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, 227-228.

⁴² Ibid., 227

⁴³ Booth, *The Doctrines of The Salvation Army*, 100.

was very much an official Salvation Army gathering, however there was a welcome encouragement to explore issues, even though on the international doctrine council website where the papers are published, it states that the papers are not necessarily the official view of The Salvation Army. One of the delegates was asked to prepare a paper entitled *Will all be saved?* In the light of the doctrine of endless punishment it was remarkable that the request should have been made. Even more remarkable is the paper itself, extracts of which I quote here:

I've been asked to present a short paper on the subject of universalism. *Will all be saved?* Is the title and I am going to reveal my conclusion right away. I don't know. But I hope so, and I believe we have good reason to hope so...We are addressing the idea of universalism because the doctrine of hell seems, to many, to pose a theological and ethical problem. It's the theodicy made eternal: how can the God of love and life allow the never ending suffering (or annihilation, opinions differ on the exact fate of the wicked) of God's children?...All the authors in the collection *Universalism and the doctrine of hell* (ed. Nigel M. de S. Cameron, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1992) seem to agree that God is drawing a line between the saved and the unsaved...The authors write of hell as reserved for the truly unrepentant, for pure evil doers, for those who delight in sin. Who is that person, I wonder... There is plenty of evil in the world. But are there people who are possessed by pure evil, who even at some unconscious level wish there was a way out? I doubt it. I'm thinking for instance of those in the gospels who are described as possessed by demons...it is clear that even when something evil is thought to have entirely taken over a person's life, Jesus heals, without the person necessarily being free enough to ask for it, Jesus reaches out to liberate. Why would that not be possible for the worst of sinners? And on the other hand, can I be sure to be among the saved? I call myself a Christian and I try to follow Jesus and long for a life more whole, but I haven't sold everything I have. How then am I different from the rich man who walked away from Jesus? Do I do good to all who need me? (cf. Matthew 25)? Tragically, no...And what about the vast and far reaching webs we are all part of...I pay taxes to a government that sells weapons to be used in war. My flight to this conference has made the world dirtier, one step closer to ecological destruction. Not only my conscious choices but also the systems I am (not always wilfully) part of contribute to this world's suffering. Where then will God draw the line between saints and sinner, between saved and unsaved? A question just as legitimate as *will all be saved?* would be, I think, is *will anybody be saved?* It seems to me that when all is accounted for, a clear distinction between believer and sinner will be difficult to make. The line will be drawn not between individuals but through each individual. All I can say is 'have mercy on me'. Will all be saved? I don't know. But I truly hope so. And for me it is hard to believe otherwise.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Miriam Kjellgren. "Will all be saved?" Paper presented at The Salvation Army International Symposium on Doctrine Theology and Ethics, London, October 15, 2014.

The fact that this paper has been allowed, even encouraged, and was presented at an International Salvation Army conference indicates a considerable theological distance from the strident conviction of William Booth who believed in Hell 'all the time...the place of punishment where God consigns the wicked for ever...because it is a plain doctrine of the Bible'⁴⁵ It is very evident today that endless punishment is far from a plain doctrine of the Bible and in fact is the subject of constant theological debate even amongst conservative evangelicals. In Roger Green's carefully researched *War on Two Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth*⁴⁶ he argues that Booth had a passionate desire to evangelise the world, but did not have a very developed theological discernment:

Herein lies a recurring chief weakness with Booth who willingly entered the theological dialogue by his preaching: he was content to believe that his understanding of atonement (and his other doctrines) came directly from the Bible and that what he was preaching and teaching was concomitant with the complete word of God in Scripture. He often demonstrated a lack of perception concerning the development of a doctrine within the Bible itself, or the complicated and various means used in the Bible to elucidate a particular doctrine. He likewise demonstrated a lack of perception about the development of a doctrine within the history of the Church, or similarly, the various and complicated means used to explain a doctrine. Finally, he did not demonstrate understanding of how his own theological background, culture, or environment shaped the very language he used to articulate, for example, the atonement.⁴⁷

Not only has the doctrine of Hell undergone considerable revision and development in the successive handbooks of doctrine, but the doctrines of the immortality of the soul and the general judgement have also been re-evaluated. Fudge outlines very

⁴⁵ Booth, *Doctrines of The Salvation Army*, 1893.

⁴⁶ Roger Green, *War on Two Fronts: The Redemptive Theology of William Booth* (Atlanta: The Salvation Army, 1989)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

clearly the Platonic origins of the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

He also is in no doubt that this doctrine, which The Salvation Army adopted right from its beginnings, is less than biblical and erroneous:

The Platonic element in traditionalism is the notion that all human beings are immortal. That Plato left God out of the picture does not make the notion of universal human immortality any less Platonic. Nor does the non-biblical notion that all human beings are immortal suddenly become biblical because traditionalists and Plato disagree on the source of that immortality. It is possible to borrow some of Plato's teaching without taking everything the Greek philosopher taught.

The first book written by William Booth to explain the doctrines of the newly formed Salvation Army does not address the issue of the immortality of the soul.

He simply answers the question concerning what happens to the soul of the salvation soldier when he dies by saying 'His glorified spirit enters heaven the moment it leaves the body'.⁴⁸ By the time of the 1922 revision of the Handbook of Doctrine a much more explicit belief in the immortality of the soul is stated:

The soul is immortal, it will never cease to exist. Men everywhere instinctively feel that they will live on after death. The Bible confirms this instinct by taking for granted the immortality of the soul.⁴⁹

The 1922 Handbook does not cite any clear biblical references to support the concept of the immortality of the soul, because none exist. The attempt to uphold this doctrine by suggesting that the Bible takes it for granted represents a creative if somewhat dubious hermeneutical approach. By the time of the 1998 Handbook called *Salvation Story*, this affirmation of the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is completely removed and new headings appear in the chapter on eschatology. Under the heading of 'The triumph of the Kingdom of God' the handbook states 'Images of banquets and wedding feasts, of water that never runs dry, of life giving

⁴⁸ Booth, *The Doctrines of The Salvation Army*, 97.

⁴⁹ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 1922, 146.

trees and an ever welcoming eternal city express hope in concrete terms, they remind us that God plans for us a whole, fully personal eternal life together.⁵⁰

Under the heading 'The immortality of the soul' the statement is much less dogmatic than the 1922 edition, and interestingly says ' It is important to recognize... that apart from God's action there is no part of us that naturally survives beyond death.'⁵¹ This seems to be a major departure for The Salvation Army and has significant implications for its doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked. The 2010 Handbook goes further and completely denies that we are created with immortal souls, as the doctrine of the immortality of the souls implies:

The believer is raised to a state of eternal life, which is sometimes described as immortality. We were created for immortality, not with immortality. We receive immortality as a divine gift (Romans 2:7) and will be immortal through grace. It is a future inheritance, not a present possession. God can clothe our mortality with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:53)....The spread of Christianity in the Hellenistic world (i.e. the world influenced by Greek culture, language and thought forms), brought it into contact with new influences. In anthropology which is influenced by the ideas of Plato (Platonic anthropology), a human being is perceived as a dualistic being with a soul and a body which are two opposing entities, rather than as a holistic human being, as in Jewish thought. The dualistic view not only separates humanity into substances, but sees the human body as of lesser value than the soul. Only the soul, which is spirit, is immortal. This had consequences for the way Christians explained the belief in everlasting life. A negative view of the body as inherently evil and belief in immortality as a quality belonging to the individual soul secured a foothold in the Church. Through the influence of Platonic thinking, immortality became part of the teaching of the Church, even though it was never reflected in the classical creeds. It was included in the 17th century Westminster Confession of Faith and from here the expression, but not the Platonic meaning, has become part of Salvation Army doctrine. God alone is immortal (1 Timothy 6:15, 16). Humanity is mortal, and it is the clear teaching of Paul that immortality is a divine gift which will be given only through a future resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:53-55). In The Salvation Army, as in other Protestant churches, immortality is seen in this context and not as an inherent quality of humanity.⁵²

⁵⁰ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Story*, 116.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵² The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, 235-237.

It seems that The Salvation Army has moved considerably with regard to this doctrine since the Handbook of 1922. It can no longer be said that we believe in the immortality of the soul in the traditional understanding of that phrase. This can be said of much of modern scholarship, as Fudge comments in his discussion of the immortality of the soul, 'it is increasingly regarded as a post-apostolic innovation, not only unnecessary but positively harmful to proper biblical interpretation and understanding.'⁵³ I agree with Fudge and argue that it has been very harmful in that it supported Christian denominations such as The Salvation Army in their teaching of the endless punishment of the wicked. The argument was that if everyone is immortal, and their souls can never die, God will have to accommodate the unrepentant apart from in heaven:

Since at least the fourth century, most Christians have been taught that every human being will live forever. "You have an immortal soul," the revivalist's message often put it, "and it will spend eternity in either heaven or hell." Quite often, the sermon featured the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus...the doctrine of immortal souls was the womb from which the traditional Christian teaching of unending conscious torment was born.⁵⁴

The inevitable progression from belief in the immortality of the soul to belief in the endless punishment of the wicked throughout Christian history from the early Church fathers is highlighted by Fudge:

Tertullian reasoned explicitly from immortality to everlasting torment, as did Augustine nearly two centuries later. So also did Pusey and Shedd in the nineteenth century, as have many others besides...Because these traditionalists believe that every human will be immortal in the age to come, they approach the Scriptures with a presupposition that those who go to hell cannot literally be destroyed and pass out of existence. Understandably and inevitably, the traditionalists' presupposition of

⁵³ Edward Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes: A Biblical and Historical Study of the Doctrine of Final Punishment* 3rd ed. (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011) 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

universal human immortality entices them to interpret Scripture so that they always arrive at the traditionalist conclusion.⁵⁵

The founders of The Salvation Army, along with many other evangelicals, seemed to believe and teach that every human is intrinsically immortal and therefore will be immortal in the age to come even if, as may be suspected, it was an unconsidered belief which was more simply a shorthand for belief in life after death. However, the immortality of the soul was taught as a fully Christian belief, enshrined in our doctrinal statement of faith, and taught in handbooks of doctrine until recently. In the light of scholarship and theological reflection, changes in our perspective on the immortality of the soul as evidenced in the 1998 and 2010 handbooks of doctrine have been made. Perhaps it was not recognized in earlier generations that this is a Greek rather than a Jewish or Christian idea. Also, if humans are intrinsically immortal they are not in need of resurrection. The significant modification on this matter by The Salvation Army recognizes that humans are not naturally immortal, but are gifted with immortality through the death and resurrection of Jesus. 'When this perishable body puts on imperishability, and this mortal body puts on immortality, then the saying that is written will be fulfilled: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' (1 Corinthians 15:54) The picture presented in the New Testament is that without the victory of the Messiah Jesus over death, we are dead.

It is uncertain if those members of the International Doctrine Council who have wisely initiated this new perspective on the immortality of the soul, quite

⁵⁵ Ibid., 32.

understand how inextricably connected this doctrine is with the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked, as Fudge indicates:

The relation between the doctrine of the soul's immortality and the doctrine of final punishment is real. If every soul lives forever, there are only two possibilities concerning those who go to hell. Either they will endure unending conscious torment, or else they will be restored to God's favour and be delivered from hell. Advocates of unending conscious torment cling tenaciously to their doctrine, for they truly believe that the Bible teaches the indestructibility of every human being. But that is an opinion that no longer goes unchallenged.⁵⁶

Fudge is arguing from an annihilationist perspective and rightly perceives the strong link between the doctrine of the immortality of the soul and the endless punishment of the wicked. However, he seems to indicate that the restorationist case also depends on belief in the immortality of the soul, which I would argue against. If the purpose of God is to reconcile and restore all of his beloved image bearing creation then this is not at all dependent on humankind being intrinsically immortal. It is the traditionalist case that is damaged by a rejection of the immortality of the soul. If Salvation Army leadership wish to encourage Salvationists to continue to believe and teach endless punishment whilst at the same time rejecting the traditional doctrine of the immortality of the soul, then the implications of this must be clearly understood. Those of us who preach and teach in The Salvation Army will inevitably be required to believe and teach that God will gift some people with sustainable life after they die simply in order to torment them forever. If they are not immortal beings then God will have to support their existence endlessly with no purpose or desire other than to punish them in retribution for failing to repentant and exercise saving faith in Jesus Christ during

⁵⁶ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 25.

their human existence. This position seems very difficult to sustain in the light of the many passages of Scripture which insist on declaring the everlasting love and mercy of our creator. One such passage is Psalm 136 which states repeatedly that God's mercy endures forever. In the light of the changes to The Salvation Army Handbooks of Doctrine of 1998 and 2010, Salvationists are in the position in which to sustain a belief in the endless punishment of the wicked is even more untenable than it was before our new understanding of the immortality of the soul. As Moltmann rightly argues, 'How can the God who loves what he has created condemn not just what is evil, destructive and godless in created beings but these beings themselves?'⁵⁷

The phrase on the resurrection of the body in Salvation Army doctrine is reasonably straightforward and nowhere near as controversial as the immortality of the soul or the endless punishment of the wicked. The wording has hardly changed since the 1922 Handbook. This is the 1998 version:

The phrase, 'the resurrection of the body' is the biblical way to express Christian belief in life after death. In the Bible the word 'body' means the whole person. The phrase safeguards the integrity of the human person. We do not look forward to becoming mere disembodied spirits, but whole persons, fully alive with Christ in God.⁵⁸

There is a danger of being too literalist with regard to this doctrine and there are stories of Salvationists of former generations refusing to be cremated on the grounds of this doctrine. According to Jon Sweeney, some Christians in the Medieval era could be far more literalists than early Salvationists:

⁵⁷ Jurgen Moltmann, *The coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1996.), 236.

⁵⁸ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Story*, 118.

The medieval Christian imagination even wondered if bodily resurrection would be possible if all the parts of the body were dispersed, devoured, and digested in the stomachs of bugs and animals. That would be a lot of gathering and reassembling at the moment of Christ's return. Many medieval manuscript illuminations illustrate this, with beasts in water and on land vomiting up body parts that are floating into the sky to hopefully come together like scattered jigsaw puzzle pieces.⁵⁹

However misunderstood and difficult to comprehend this doctrine is, it is well attested in Scripture. Paul is very convinced of the centrality for Christians on this matter of the resurrection of the body. 'Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our proclamation has been in vain and your faith has been in vain.' (1 Corinthians 15:12-14) It is interesting to note that the elements of doctrine eleven which have always to some extent been controversial and were absent from the earliest creeds, are the ones which have had their understanding revised in the handbooks of doctrine in recent decades. The resurrection of the body is a profoundly Christian doctrine, taught in the earliest creeds of the Church, and so stands the test of time in Salvationist belief. In his book *Tokens of Trust*, Rowan Williams affirms belief in the resurrection of the body as against the immortality of the soul in his discussion of the Creeds 'we should notice that we're not asked to declare a belief in 'eternal life' in general or in 'immortality'.⁶⁰ He then goes on to suggest that the ground for our future hope should not be in becoming disembodied souls but participating in the full resurrection life of the age to come:

Christian faith says that since God has come to encounter us in this world of material bodies, as a material body, and since God continues to use material things and persons to communicate who and what he is, we can't suppose that life with him

⁵⁹ Jon Sweeney, *Inventing Hell: Dante, the Bible and Eternal Torment* (New York: Jericho Books, 2014), 39.

⁶⁰ Rowan Williams and David Jones, *Tokens of Trust: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 2007), 139.

will ever simply sidestep our material life. The Bible speaks rather seldom of life with God in heaven; it is more inclined to talk about a renewal of creation, 'a new heaven and a new earth', as in the last book of the Bible. Life with God, it seems, is life in a *world* that has something in common with the world we now inhabit.⁶¹

With regard to the phrase 'the general judgement at the end of the world' the language of the first handbook is fairly stark, very brief and is again utilises the question and answer format:

What are your views on the Judgment Day? That in the end of the world there will be a general judgment of all mankind, when the righteous will be acknowledged, vindicated, and rewarded, and the wicked will be discovered and condemned and punished. Will the world be destroyed at this time? Yes!⁶²

This seems very far from the hope of resurrection life in a new heaven and a new earth that Rowan Williams and many other theologians argue for. For Booth and the early Salvationists, the general judgment was the time of the final separation of the fates of the righteous and wicked. If some are in heaven and the rest in Hell there is no longer any purpose for the world and so it will be destroyed. This is a worldview where the most important purpose of all is to rescue as many as possible from the terrible fate of endless punishment. Love for planet earth and stewardship of its resources was not in the theological framework for these conservative evangelicals who thought that the earth would be destroyed after the general judgment at the end of the world. All 'worldly' things were completely shunned. My parents, grandparents and great grandparents were forbidden to attend dances, the theatre, cinema, and even football matches. They were taught that the day of judgment was coming soon and the things of this world and the world itself would soon be passed away. By the time of the 2010 Handbook, there is

⁶¹ Ibid.,140.

⁶² Booth, *The Doctrines of The Salvation Army*, 98.

a very much more positive view with regard to what Salvationists should believe about the general judgement. It becomes 'the victory of love over fear' and the establishment of the new heaven and new earth. There is no mention of the world being destroyed here:

Judgment is the fulfilment of God's promises. It is the fullest affirmation of God's righteousness, of the liberating message of the New Testament, of the trusting faith of those who believe in a loving God. Judgment manifests the triumph of good over evil, the righting of wrongs, the validation of the truth, the victory of love over fear, the new Heaven and the new earth. Judgment is also the fullest affirmation of universal accountability. All are accountable to God, during life and beyond death. This is the clear message of the New Testament. We have personal responsibility for our lives, for the choices we make, for our attitude and actions towards our fellows, for the stewardship of what we have received, for our ultimate destiny (Matthew 25:31-46). This accountability is essential to our dignity as bearers of the divine image: God takes us seriously. God alone is the judge. Because our judge is also our Saviour, we can face judgment with confidence. His judgment will validate our faith-response (1 John 4:17). We can rest with assurance in the mercy and grace of God, as well as in his absolute justice (Psalm 9:8; 1 Corinthians 3:13-15). We cannot dictate to God who will be saved and who not. But we can trust to the judgment of God the lives of all those whose life and experience, personal creed and spiritual opportunities are different from our own because he is the loving Creator of all (Romans 2:12-16).⁶³

This statement on the final judgment is far removed from the earlier handbooks and reflects doctrinal development leading to a very different theological perspective which rests on 'the mercy and grace of God'.⁶⁴ Jürgen Moltmann traces the very negative and fearful connotations which the general judgment gained back to the time of Constantine when the Church adopted many of the concepts and principles of the Roman Empire:

The expectation of a Last Judgment has always had a particular fascination for the imagination of Christians. In mediaeval churches, we see the final judgment represented on the outside...on the right hand side, angels carry the righteous away to the heaven of everlasting bliss; on the left devils drag the wicked into the hell of everlasting damnation... Originally, hope for the Last Judgment was a hope cherished by the victims of world history, a hope that the divine justice would triumph over

⁶³ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, 227.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

their oppressors and murderers. It was only after Constantine that judgment, now orientated solely towards the perpetrators, was interpreted as a divine criminal tribunal where evil doers were tried, and was understood as the prototype of imperial judicial power.⁶⁵

Other theologians also understand the final judgment in a far more creative way than the early Salvation Army handbooks which saw it simply as the time of the separation of the righteous and the wicked by the eternal judge. For example Wolfhart Pannenberg states 'Only the eschatological consummation in which God will wipe away all tears (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:4) can remove all doubts concerning the revelation of the love of God in creation and salvation history even though the love of God has been at work already at each stage in the history of salvation.'⁶⁶ This is not a picture of a dispassionate judge separating the wicked from the righteous in an objective and legalistic way, but the inevitable consequence of the *Missio Dei*, which has always been to achieve renewal and reconciliation for all creation. Robert Jenson also has a very positive view of the final judgment:

The last judgment is simply a judgment that encompasses the entire human community and after which another will not be needed. It will be the act of God in which all the accumulated injustice in history, of the total human community, is put right, and humanity is made one vast network of unique persons each taking his or her uniqueness as the opportunity of love for all the rest.'⁶⁷

These and many other theological insights into the nature of the final judgment has helped The Salvation Army see its stance on the general judgment in a new light.

⁶⁵ Moltmann, *The Coming of God*, 235.

⁶⁶ Lindsay Hall et al., *SCM Reader: Christian Doctrine* (London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 451.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 462.

Moltmann, sums up this positive perspective when he says:

Judgment is not God's last word. Judgment establishes in the world the divine righteousness on which the new creation is to be built. But God's last word is 'Behold I make *all things* new.' (Revelation 21:5). From this no one is excepted.⁶⁸

This is a far richer and deeper view of the general judgment at the end of the world, than the traditional theology adopted by the first Salvationists which postulated the separation of humankind to Heaven or Hell.

Although the eleventh doctrine is still affirmed by every member and officer in The Salvation Army, it is clear from an examination of the various handbooks that the normative theological stance on the endless punishment of the wicked, the immortality of the soul and the general judgment at the end of the world, has been considerably modified from that what was believed and taught by the first generations of Salvationists. Through the publication of the 1998 and 2010 handbooks of doctrine the International Doctrine Council has articulated a new hermeneutical approach to these theological concepts. The challenge is that doctrine eleven still stands in all its starkness as The Salvation Army's central normative statement of faith with regard to eschatology. This has implications for those who are considering membership or ministry within The Salvation Army and those already in the movement who find it increasingly difficult to uphold and support this doctrinal position with integrity. In simple terms, no one is able to become or remain a Salvationist unless they affirm belief in The Salvation Army's eleven articles of faith which, of course, includes belief in the immortality of the soul and in the endless punishment of the wicked. The various revisions in the

⁶⁸ Bauckham, *God Will be All in All*, 47.

handbooks of doctrine over the decades is compelling evidence that there has been doctrinal development in The Salvation Army reflective of a growing discontinuity between the normative doctrinal statement with regard to Hell and other normative, formative, espoused and operant theological voices articulated by Salvationists in recent decades.

Other possible textual sources of evidence of this growing discontinuity may be found in the various Salvation Army hymn books published over the years. These collections of hymns which are called song books, are always published with the authority of the General and are the official hymn book of the denomination and translated into many languages around the world. These are widely used normative texts, reflecting the theological perspective of the movement in hymnology. The 1911 song book contents page⁶⁹ has a section entitled salvation with subsections on sinners warned, death, judgement and Hell amongst others. In the song book published in 1930 the contents page⁷⁰ still contains subsections on sinners warned, death, judgement and Hell. The hymns in the Hell section are almost impossible to imagine a congregation ever singing, but were still included in the 1930 song book:

Oh, millions cry in Hell today, all is lost!
Amid eternal flames they stay, all is lost!
The summer's o'er, the harvest past,
The die, the dreadful die is cast,
And threatened woe is come at last, all is lost!⁷¹ .

⁶⁹ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Army Songs* (London, Salvation Army Book Dept., 1911), v.

⁷⁰ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Army Songs* (London, Salvationist Publishing and Supplies Ltd., 1930), viii.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

Rowan Williams in *Why Study History? The Quest for the Historical Church*, warns of the challenges and dangers of historical and theological research. He encourages the reader to recognise the inevitable strangeness of the past, whilst not abandoning the possibility of gaining theological insight from the richness of the past. He speaks of ‘the two false certainties’⁷² of thinking that the past is so strange that we can learn nothing from it, or that there is complete historical continuity and we can simply extrapolate the insights of history for our own current use. This glimpse into Salvation Army practice in the past is indeed very strange, but perhaps provides a clue that in the early decades of the twentieth century there was a much stronger continuity between the normative doctrine of Hell and congregational life. The hymns in the 1930 song book would have been revised and updated from previous publications, so it can be assumed that any hymn that was never used or was thought to be inappropriate, would not have been included. By the time of the 1953 song book, the contents page has separate sections on *Death and Judgement* and *Heaven and Hell*⁷³, containing over forty hymns. However, the majority of the hymns in these sections are encouraging, hopeful and speak of the glorious prospect of heaven for those who choose to follow Christ. The contents page of the 1986 edition of the song book drops any reference to Hell and simply has a section called *The Life to Come*⁷⁴. There are still over forty hymns in this section but almost all of them are about how wonderful heaven is going to be. There is one hymn that

⁷² Rowan Williams, *Why Study the Past? The Quest of the Historical Church* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2014), 92.

⁷³ The Salvation Army, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London, Salvationist Publishing and Supplies Ltd., 1953), x.

⁷⁴ The Salvation Army, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London, International Headquarters, 1986), 1.

alludes to Hell in its third verse, 'Where God is not! 'O awful thought...Where dread remorse and vain desire burn like an unconsuming fire.'⁷⁵ Here Hell has become the absence of God and the fire is metaphorical, very different from the Hell of the first generations. In the 2015 song book⁷⁶, the contents page has a subsection entitled *Eternal hope*, which contains thirty four hymns all of which are positive and hopeful. There can be no doubt that in the cherished Wesleyan tradition, Salvationists wholeheartedly sing their theology, often accompanied by brass bands, which is not so Wesleyan. This brief survey of Salvationist hymnology provides more evidence of doctrinal development and an emerging discontinuity between the normative doctrine of Hell and current practice, in that Salvationists no longer sing about Hell as they once did.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 710.

⁷⁶ The Salvation Army, *The Song Book of The Salvation Army* (London, International Headquarters, 2015)

Chapter 3 - The Salvation Army Doctrine of Hell and its Alternatives

It must be recognized at the outset of this chapter that just because a doctrine is not in vogue in any given age does not invalidate its veracity. For denominations such as The Salvation Army, steeped in propositional ways of thinking, the fundamental question is not, is the doctrine of Hell popular, but does it reflect biblical truth? However, this is not an issue that can be settled in any simplistic way. There are alternative ways of interpreting the biblical material as well as alternative ways of understanding doctrine, and as Alister McGrath rightly notes 'It is simply a theological truism that no human language can be applied to God univocally.'⁷⁷

3.1 Alternative Approaches to Doctrine

George Lindbeck in his influential book *The Nature of Doctrine* critiques both propositional and non-propositional ways of seeing the place of doctrine and posits a third way of understand how doctrine can function in the faith community. This he calls the cultural-linguistic approach:

In a cultural-linguistic outlook, religions are thought of primarily as idioms for construing reality, expressing experience, and ordering life. Attention when considering the question of truth, focuses on the categories (or "grammar," or "rules of the game") in terms of which the truth claims are made and expressive symbolisms employed. Thus, the questions raised in comparing religions have to do first of all with the adequacy of their categories. Adequate categories are those which can be made to apply to what is taken to be real, and which therefore make possible, though they do not guarantee, propositional, practical and symbolic truth.

⁷⁷ Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundation of Doctrinal Criticism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 18.

A religion that is thought of as having such categories can be said to be categorically true.⁷⁸

Lindbeck sees doctrine as a rich cultural language which is learned by the community of faith and which enables it to communicate and flourish, very much as the rules of grammar enables a language to be comprehensible:

A comprehensive scheme or story used to structure all dimensions of experience is not primarily a set of propositions to be believed, but is rather the medium by which one moves, a set of skills that one employs in one's life. Its vocabulary of symbols and its syntax maybe used for many purposes, only one of which is the formulation of statements about reality.⁷⁹

In this postliberal framework Lindbeck affirms special revelation and rejects approaches to doctrine which are based on the historical critical method alone. His creative 'cultural-linguistic' outlook offers a rich alternative to what he calls the 'cognitive-propositionalist' which rests on individuals learning sets of propositions which they have to believe and defend in an inerrant way. The other approach to doctrine which Lindbeck rejects is the 'experiential-expressive' tradition of academic liberal theology in the line of Schleiermacher and which 'interprets doctrines as non-informative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes or existential orientations.'⁸⁰ The context of the development of Lindbeck's taxonomy is his strong commitment to ecumenical dialogue and his frustrations with ecumenical dialogical impasse. His postliberal third way could also be seen as a useful way to approach doctrinal dialogue within denominational faith communities

⁷⁸ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 47-48.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 35.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 16.

such as The Salvation Army, which struggles to perceive doctrine in any other way except propositionally.

Alister McGrath in *The Genesis of Doctrine* offers a thoughtful critique of Lindbeck's work in which he suggests that both the cognitive and expressive approaches to doctrine, if understood in all their historical richness, can complement the cultural-linguistic approach rather than be replaced by it.⁸¹ In the light of his critique, McGrath outlines four ways in which he understands doctrine has been used throughout the Christian era:

1. Doctrine functions as a social demarcator
2. Doctrine is generated by, and subsequently interprets the Christian narrative
3. Doctrine interprets experience
4. Doctrine makes truth claims⁸²

These four theses, alongside Lindbeck's innovative insights, can inspire those Salvationists who are experiencing disquiet with regard to the eleven articles of faith, to understand the place of doctrine in alternative and creative ways.

There can be no doubt that doctrine functions as a social demarcator in The Salvation Army. Only those who publically sign a declaration of belief in the eleven doctrines of The Salvation Army can wear its uniform, participate in local leadership and become full time officers. As McGrath states 'Doctrine is thus linked with the affirmation of the need for certain identity-giving parameters for the community, providing ideological justification for its continued existence.'⁸³ If the main function of doctrine for any denomination is as social demarcator, then any debate with

⁸¹ McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 34.

⁸² Ibid., 37.

⁸³ Ibid., 38.

regard to the veracity of a particular doctrine, is very difficult to engage in objectively for those who wish to maintain clear boundaries concerning who belongs and who does not. It is very interesting that McGrath argues that ‘The very early Christian communities...did not require doctrinal formulations to distinguish themselves from the world’⁸⁴ This insight could be an encouragement to any Christian denomination like The Salvation Army, who clearly utilize doctrine as a social demarcator, to explore alternative ways of seeing the place of doctrine amongst us. Another way to perceive doctrine according to McGrath is to see doctrine as an interpreter of the Christian narrative. It is Scripture which generates the narrative from which doctrine is originated, including the story of Israel and especially the narrative surrounding Jesus of Nazareth. It is this biblical narrative which funds faith today in a way that a propositional approach to doctrine, although derived from this narrative, seems to be failing to do. Being required to give mental assent to a set of propositions, does not seem to resonate with many church members in the twenty first century. This inevitably raises questions surrounding the debate with regard to the place and authority of Scripture. In *The Drama of Doctrine*, Kevin Vanhoozer, an evangelical who is sympathetic to the postliberal position, critiques what he calls the cultural-linguistic turn. His critique seems fair and generous, but then he adds ‘Yet relevant questions remain. The most important is whether such an approach has more of sociology than theology about it.’⁸⁵ He goes on to say ‘It is important to recognize that there is something in the nature of theology’s subject matter, God, the gospel, that resists being

⁸⁴ Ibid., 39.

⁸⁵ Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 7.

designated as mere local custom.’⁸⁶ He proceeds to offer an alternative way to the cultural-linguistic perspective of Lindbeck and others, replacing ‘cultural’ with ‘canonical’:

Canonical-linguistic theology represents a way beyond the debilitating stand off between propositionalist and nonpropositionalist modes of conceiving revelation, Scripture, and theology...the most important lesson being to orient theology toward the goal of practical wisdom rather than mere theoretical knowledge.⁸⁷

Vanhoozer’s premise is that Scripture provides the script and the Church is the cast, living out the Christian story. He sees doctrine supporting this living out of the story. ‘Doctrine proceeds from an authoritative script and gives direction as to how individuals and the church can participate fittingly in the drama of redemption’.⁸⁸

This canonical-linguistic approach offers another more theologically conservative, yet still creative and thought provoking way of seeing doctrine in narrative terms.

The third of McGrath’s ways of understanding how doctrine can function is to see it as a way of interpreting experience.

Underlying the profundity of human experience and encounter lies an unresolved tension-the tension between the wish to express an experience in words, and the inability of words to capture that experience in its fullness. Everything in human experience which is precious and significant is threatened with extinction, in that it is in some sense beyond words, and yet requires to be stated in words for it to become human knowledge. It is threatened with the spectre of solipsism in that unless an experience can be communicated to another, it remains trapped within the private experiential world of an individual.⁸⁹

This approach encourages humility with regard to the limitations of the propositional way of understanding doctrine. McGrath speaks of the inability of words to capture experiences which are comprehended beyond the limitation of

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 78.

⁸⁹ McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 67.

words, and this of course, includes the finite human inability to understand or express the infinite nature of the Divine.

The final way that doctrine has been understood over the centuries is to see it as a way to make truth claims. This way, based on creedal statements of faith, has been the most readily recognized function of doctrine. Salvationists have been taught that doctrine is foundational to faith and represents objective Scriptural truth, whilst recognizing that personal faith may be difficult to define:

Some people may wonder why Salvationists place such emphasis upon a written statement of faith. At the heart of Christianity is the believer's relationship with Jesus Christ, which is deeply personal and may often elude definition. Yet it is also inescapably communal and will flourish best in fellowship with other believers. Through the centuries the Church has learned to express the common experience of faith, in ways that are consistent with the biblical witness, in creeds and statements of faith.⁹⁰

This Salvation Army statement hints that there are alternatives to the purely propositional perspective with regard to the place and function amongst us. It is hoped that as Salvationists grapple with the issue of an increasing disquiet towards our normative articles of faith, the above alternative insights into the nature of doctrine will fund creative ways for our particular faith community to be challenged and enriched by our doctrines.

Christian doctrine exists under constraints similar to those affecting poetry: it is obliged to express in historical forms, in words, those things which by their very nature defy reduction to these forms; nevertheless, there is a fundamental resonance between words and experience.⁹¹

⁹⁰ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine* 2010, xvii.

⁹¹ McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 69.3.2

3.2 Alternative Approaches to Hell as Endless Punishment

In *Life after Death: A New Approach to the Last Things*, Anthony Thistleton makes a convincing case for the premise that there were three main views with regard to what happens after death for the unrepentant sinner in the early Church; endless punishment, annihilation and universal restoration. He notes 'It is a mistake to be seduced into thinking that 'Hell' has always denoted everlasting punishment in 'orthodox' theology'.⁹² It is the contention of this thesis that this is the mistake the founders of The Salvation Army made and is exactly the mistake that many in The Salvation Army have continued to make throughout the generations of its existence. It may be somewhat of a surprise to some other evangelicals, and not only to Salvationists, to discover that these three views have existed throughout the history of the Church and that all of them make a claim to be biblical as well as theologically robust. Edward Fudge speaks for many when he says 'As mainline evangelicals, we were at home with the majority interpretation of Hell as unending conscious torment, and we assumed that it was thoroughly biblical and beyond dispute'.⁹³

The three main views are sometimes referred to as traditionalism, conditionalism and restorationism, although there are a range of perspectives within each of these categories. Traditionalist believe that Scripture clearly teaches that Hell is a place of the endless punishment of the wicked. The Conditionalist position is that

⁹² Anthony Thistleton. *Life after Death: a New Approach to the Last Things* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2012), 145.

⁹³ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, xxiii.

immortality is conditional on the gift of salvation and not given to unrepentant sinners, and therefore the 'wages' of sin is endless death. The Restorationist perspective is that, as God is love, any post-mortem punishment will be restorative as well as punitive, and therefore will eventually lead to the salvation of everyone. There have always been, and there continues to be, knowledgeable and sincere theological voices passionately advocating all three of these views. All claim strong biblical, theological and philosophical validity for their perspective and all claim, to variable degrees, that the other two views are the result of doubtful exegesis and poor theological and philosophical reflection. Although this is a very basic overview of the main tenets of the three main perspectives with regard to what happens to unrepentant sinners after death, it is recognised that there are many nuanced alternative views within each of these three main categories. In Steve Gregg's *All You Wanted to Know About Hell* he admits that even after all of the research he undertook for his book, he is still not sure which view is correct.⁹⁴ What we can be sure about is that the exegetical basis for any rigorous theology of the post-mortem state of the unrepentant is complex, demanding and nowhere near as straightforward as may have been assumed. Each of these three hermeneutical frameworks with regard to Hell will be examined in order to establish their strengths and weaknesses in an attempt to determine the validity of their claim to be biblical, theologically sound and philosophically reasonable. This is in order to be

⁹⁴ Steve Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell: Three Christian Views of God's Final Solution to the Problem of Sin* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), xi.

able to establish if the exclusivist statement on Hell in Salvation Army doctrine is biblical, theologically coherent and philosophically sustainable.

Although a wide ranging, balanced overview of Scripture is central to the critique of the three views, the weight of Church tradition bears heavily on this debate. George Hunsinger in an essay on Hell in his *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth*⁹⁵ claims that, 'No one has had stronger influence on Christian beliefs about Hell than Augustine (354-430), the bishop of Hippo and great theologian of the Church.'⁹⁶ He writes of the powerful influence of Augustine on this issue:

The definition that Augustine gave to the doctrine of Hell can be analysed into seven basic components. Although many of these components were of course present in Christian belief prior to his time, Augustine systematized and defended them in an unprecedented way. The result was what we might call the strong view of Hell. Analysing this view will provide us with a useful yardstick against which alternative or competing views within the Christian tradition can be measured and understood.

⁹⁷

In his *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love* Augustine outlines what for him are the certainties of the resurrection of the lost:

But as for those who, out of the mass of perdition caused by the first man's sin, are not redeemed through the one Mediator between God and man, they too shall rise again, each with his own body, but only to be punished with the devil and his angels. Now, whether they shall rise again with all their diseases and deformities of body, bringing with them the diseased and deformed limbs which they possessed here, it would be labour lost to inquire. For we need not weary ourselves speculating about their health or their beauty, which are matters uncertain, when their eternal damnation is a matter of certainty... the unhappy are not permitted to die, then, if I may so speak, death itself dies not; and where pain without intermission afflicts the soul, and never comes to an end, corruption itself is not completed. This is called in Holy Scripture 'the second death'.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ George Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000).

⁹⁶ Ibid., 229.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁹⁸ Saint Augustine, *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope and Love*, Trans. J.B. Shaw (Washington: Regnery Publishing Inc., 1961), 106-107.

From this 92nd Enchiridion Augustine claimed that Hell, for those who are not redeemed, is actual and is also endless. In the 95th Enchiridion Augustine states that Hell is ordained or willed by God 'Assuredly there was no injustice in God's not willing that they should be saved though they could have been saved had he so willed it.'⁹⁹ The 99th Enchiridion indicates that Hell is just 'if not a single member of the race had been redeemed, no one could justly have questioned the justice of God.'¹⁰⁰ and inscrutable 'For if a man does not understand these matters, who is he that he should reply against God.'¹⁰¹ In *The City of God Against the Pagans*, Augustine outlines how severe Hell is '...the second death. For that is more grievous still, and the worst of all evils. For it consists not in the separation of soul and body but in the union of both in eternal punishment.'¹⁰² He also emphasises the penal nature of Hell 'for in that penal and everlasting punishment...the soul is justly said to die, because it does not live in connection with God.'¹⁰³ Thus, Augustine utilising a very literalist hermeneutical approach, established the basic framework of the traditionalist case, which a large majority of the Church has accepted for many centuries. For Augustine Hell is actual, severe, endless, penal, just, ordained by God, and inscrutable. Other great theologians have added weight to the traditional argument with various justifications

⁹⁹ Ibid.,109.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,116.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.,115.

¹⁰² Saint Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans* Trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 554.

¹⁰² Ibid., 283

for belief in the endless punishment of the wicked. Notable amongst these was Thomas Aquinas whose argument was that sin against an infinite God deserves infinite punishment:

Now a sin that is against God is infinite; the higher the person against whom it is committed, the graver the sin, it is more criminal to strike a head of state than a private citizen, and God is of infinite greatness. Therefore, an infinite punishment is deserved for a sin committed against him.¹⁰⁴

This argument seems to be more an attempt to justify the doctrine of endless punishment rather than speak truth about the consequences of God being infinite. No human ever asked to be born and our frailty is evident. Therefore, it seems not only intolerable but illogical to put such weight on human finite failings, terrible as they sometimes are, 'For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust.' Psalm 103:14. Steve Scianni rightly argues that it is a fanciful and unbiblical idea:

...this theodicy ends with too small a god and too large a man. Humans can affect God so severely so as to set him off into infinite wrath. That God is so drastically impinged upon by his own creation is certainly mankind getting too much credit, it is an anthropocentric fiction.¹⁰⁵

The enormous stature of Augustine and Aquinas in the Church has meant that the traditional view of Hell has been almost universally accepted. However there have always been other theological voices which have questioned the traditional argument. A conditionalist would agree with Augustine's inventory, except that they do not accept that Hell is endless, in any other sense than the fact that death is

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1974), 1a2ae.25.

¹⁰⁵ Steve Scianni, *On the Contributions of Chris Morgan in Hell Under Fire*, accessed January 25, 2015, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/view/34905112/on-the-contributions-of-chris-morgan-in-hell-under-fire-hunger-truth>,

endless. Against Aquinas, they would argue that the infinite punishment is not conscious torture but annihilation. A restorationist would argue with at least two of Augustine's components, as they claim that Hell is neither endless nor purely penal but ultimately restorative. The argument of Aquinas for infinite punishment, from a restorationist perspective negates the infinite love and mercy of God. Augustine's seven components of Hell have always had opponents, if only from a minority, for most of Church history. However, Gregory McDonald in *The Evangelical Universalist*, reminds any willing to critique the 'endless punishment' view of the enormous weight of history and tradition that is carried by this tradition and of how serious an undertaking it is:

The mainstream Christian tradition speaks clearly on this issue, as does traditional interpretation of several key biblical texts. All who fail to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ, so the tradition goes, will be condemned to eternal, conscious torment in Hell. The moment of death is the moment after which there are no more chances to receive God's mercy. Within the tradition there has always been a minority report in favour of annihilation or universalism, but the main thrust of the tradition is clear. I think that the reflective Christian ought to start by taking the tradition as the default position, it should be assumed to be correct unless good grounds can be found to reject it. To jettison such a long-lasting and clear tradition is something that ought to be done cautiously and reluctantly. The Christian biblical scholar, philosopher, or theologian should begin then by attempting to defend this tradition. Many have rightly done so. However, Protestants do not, in theory, recognize tradition, nor interpretations of the Bible, as infallible; so, we must be open to the possibility that we have made a mistake here.¹⁰⁶

Although it is recognised that there is no text or passage of Scripture that is decisive for everyone in this debate between the three perspectives on Hell, there is value in examining the strength of the core texts of each view. There will always be some disagreement amongst scholars as to what are the main texts and their relative

¹⁰⁶ Gregory MacDonal, *The Evangelical Universalist* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2006), 9-10.

importance. However, having surveyed some of the most influential literature produced by each group, it seems there is a reasonable consensus with regard to what their most important texts are. The core texts of each group envision very different futures for unrepentant sinners after death, which reason must conclude cannot all be right. It would be an impossibility to experience endless conscious punishment, extinction and restoration simultaneously. Christopher Date affirms the value of examining these texts in attempting to gain a theologically robust understanding of the passages on which the arguments of each view are standing:

All doctrines will have some texts that appear to be contradictory. Some will be seen as confirming the interpretation. Many texts can be seen to be consistent. But some texts function as core passages to the interpretation. These core texts are those small number of passages on which the argument is truly resting.¹⁰⁷

The main texts that repeatedly occur in the traditionalist's argument appear in the *Gehenna* passages of the synoptic gospels and the terror passages in the book of Revelation. Perhaps the most important verses for the traditionalist's case are Revelation 14:9-11 and 20:10:

Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, 'Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name. Revelation 14:9-11

And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also, another book was opened, the book of life. And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and *Hadēs* gave up the dead that were in them, and all were

¹⁰⁷ Christopher Date, Gregory Stump, and Joshua Anderson eds. *Rethinking Hell: Readings in Evangelical Conditionalism* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), Kindle edition, 3848.

judged according to what they had done. Then Death and *Hadēs* were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. Revelation 20:10-15

It can be seen why these passages are used in the defence of the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked. Gregg argues that Revelation 14:9-11 represents the strongest evidence for the traditionalist case:

This stands, as almost all commentators agree, as one of the most cogent proofs of the doctrine of eternal torment. Even Clark Pinnock, a staunch critic of this view, admitted: "This text comes closest in my mind to confirming the traditional view."... Those who worship the beast, like all other unsaved people, will experience eternal, restless torment in the presence of Christ and His angels... The passage specifically mentions "torment,"...Gregory Beale noted that "the word 'torment' (*basanismos*) in 14:10–11 is used nowhere in Revelation or biblical literature in the sense of annihilation of one's existence." The endlessness of this torment is underscored in two ways in the passage. First, the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever. Second, they have no rest day or night, meaning they remain conscious the whole time. This passage appears, *prima facie*, to be a slam-dunk for the doctrine of eternal torment.¹⁰⁸

Before it can be admitted that this passage represents a decisive proof text for the doctrine of endless punishment, an understanding of its genre and context must be sought. Richard Bauckham in *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* underscores the vital necessity of comprehending genre if a sound interpretation of the book of Revelation is to be attempted. He says 'One of the problems readers of the New Testament have with Revelation is that it seems an anomaly among the other New Testament books. Misinterpretations of Revelation often begin by misconceiving the kind of book it is.'¹⁰⁹ He goes on to say that the literary nature of Revelation is that of a meticulously constructed circulatory letter belonging to the genre of apocalypse

¹⁰⁸ Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 151-152.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

recognizable in other ancient Jewish and Christian writings. It is also most definitely prophetic in content and designed to be read aloud.¹¹⁰ It is clear from this that Revelation cannot be approached in the same way as the reasonably straightforward didactic books of the New Testament. The complex interweaving of genres and the context of Jewish apocalypse and Roman occupation demand a very cautious approach if attempting to establish Christian doctrine on the basis of verses from Revelation:

John's very precise and subtle use of Old Testament allusions creates a reservoir of meaning which can be progressively tapped...As well as their pervasive allusion to the Old Testament, the images of Revelation also echo mythological images from its contemporary world. The serpent and the dragon, Revelation's symbol for the primeval source of evil in the world, the devil (12:3-9), is a good example of a symbol with strong biblical roots (Genesis 3:14-15; Isaiah 27:1) which Revelation evokes, but also with wide cultural resonances in the mind of contemporary readers, owing to its prominence in pagan mythology and religion.¹¹¹

Bauckham convincingly argues that the book of Revelation is, amongst other things, an extremely powerful critique of the Roman Empire. 'Revelation portrays the Roman Empire as a system of violent oppression, founded on conquest, maintained by violence and oppression.'¹¹² He sees the symbolism of the beast and the harlot of Babylon pointing to the exploitative and oppressive military and political power of Rome. In the light of this it would be precarious to build a doctrine of endless punishment on such a basis, as Fudge clearly underlines:

Revelation 14:10–14 and Rev 20:10 are the two biblical texts that come closest to affirming unending conscious torment, and they are the only two texts that do. Traditionalists frequently resort to those two passages whenever they encounter any of the scores of other Scriptures that seem directly to contradict their view. Although simplistic, it is almost fair to say that this whole debate rests finally on one question: should we interpret dozens of straightforward texts throughout the Bible to match the literal sense of two symbolic texts in the Apocalypse, or ought we to

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 1-3.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 18-19.

¹¹² Ibid., 35.

interpret the two apocalyptic texts symbolically to conform to the many others? It is highly unlikely that, on any other subject, any of our traditionalist brothers or sisters finally base an entire doctrine on two texts from Revelation.¹¹³

From a restorationist perspective MacDonald argues for a symbolic reading of these passages but also adds that even if we should take these passages more literally, they are in the context of other universalistic passages such as Revelation chapters 15 and 21 where we see all the nations worshipping God. He argues that there is nothing to suggest that the nations will not survive the outpouring of God's wrath as for example Judah did in Isaiah 51:

However, given the parallels between 14:9-11 and 20:10-15, I shall assume, for the sake of argument, that 14:9-11 does refer to post-mortem judgment. Do these two texts rule out the possibility of post-mortem salvation?... This too is John's message, New Babylon has oppressed the saints and drunk the wine of their blood, but now she will drink God's cup of wrath down to the dregs. This sounds like an irreversible punishment, so it is of some interest to observe that one of the very texts from which John drew the imagery speaks of how Judah, having drained God's wrathful goblet, will have it removed. It is clear that one can drink God's wrath and move beyond to redemption. Why could it not be the same for the nations as it was for Israel? Nothing in the imagery indicates punishment with no hope of redemption.

Consider also the echoes of Sodom in 14:9-11: destructive fire from heaven, burning sulphur, the land turned to a wasteland, and ascending smoke (Genesis 19:24-28; Deuteronomy 29:22). This city became paradigmatic of God's eschatological judgment (Jude 7), and it is no surprise to find the allusions here. But it would be wrong to imagine that even a punishment so severe removed all hope of restoration. Yahweh, addressing Jerusalem, says: 'However, I will restore the fortunes of Sodom and her daughters and of Samaria and her daughters, and your fortunes along with them, so that you may bear your disgrace and be ashamed of all you have done in giving them comfort. And your sisters, Sodom with her daughters and Samaria with her daughters, will return to what they were before; and you and your daughters will return to what you were before' (Ezekiel 16:53-55)¹¹⁴

In the light of the context and highly significant Old Testament allusions in these core texts of traditionalism it is clear that they are not decisive with regard to whether or not the endless punishment of the wicked is a biblical concept. There is judgment

¹¹³ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 83.

¹¹⁴ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 126-127.

and wrath and the lake of fire which destroys, as traditionalists point out, but as in the case of Judah and Sodom and Gomorrah, the judgment and the wrath and the fire purifies, restores and brings reconciliation. Bauckham sums up the theology of Revelation with these words:

In Revelation's universal perspective, the doctrines of creation, redemption and eschatology are very closely linked. It is God the Creator of all reality who, in faithfulness to his creation, acts in Christ to reclaim and renew his whole creation. Because he is creation's Alpha he will also be its Omega. The scope of his new creation is as universal as the scope of his creation. It is as Creator that he claims his universal kingdom, taking it beyond the threat of evil and nothingness into an eternity of his own presence. An important contribution of Revelation to New Testament theology is that it puts the New Testament's central theme of salvation in Christ clearly into its total biblical, theological context of the Creator's purpose for his whole creation.¹¹⁵

However convincing scholars such as Bauckham may be, there are those willing to uphold the traditional view which sees Hell as the place of the endless punishment of the wicked. Renowned evangelical J.I. Packer, speaks of the 'sunny optimism'¹¹⁶ of universalists, who may be well meaning, but who fail to understand the Scriptural concept of the love of God and therefore the Scriptural integrity of the doctrine of endless punishment:

In Scripture, God's love appears framed by three realities. The first is his ownership of, and dominion over, all that he has made, that is his universal Lordship. He is always God on the throne and God in control. Second is his holiness, the quality whereby he requires virtue and purity of us, recoils from our vices and rebellion against him, visits the vicious with just judgement for what they have done, and vindicates himself by establishing righteousness in his world. The third reality is everybody's actual sinfulness and constant failure to match God's standards and obey his Word. It is within this framework that the divine way of acting, which the Old Testament calls goodness and loving kindness (covenant love) and the New Testament calls *agape* and *charis* (grace), finds expression.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 163-164.

¹¹⁶ Packer, J.I. 2007. 'Universalism: Will Everyone Ultimately be Saved' In *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, edited by Morgan and Robert Peterson, 194. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 190.

Packer's hermeneutical framework, makes it possible for him to believe that God is loving, kind and gracious but is also willing to consign unrepentant sinners to endless, retributive punishment. It seems that there will always be those who are willing to defend the traditional case and who do so thoughtfully and with integrity.

The conditionalist perspective, which sees endless punishment for sinners as annihilation has considerable biblical support in verses that seem to teach plainly that the penalty for unrepented sin is death. Perhaps the best known verses used to make the conditionalist case are John 3:16 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.' and Romans 6:23 'For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord'. These verses support the basic affirmation of conditionalism which is that those who have faith in Christ have eternal life and those who do not will perish. The traditionalist perspective insists that death, and its associated words, when used in the biblical record do not actually mean death but something like 'separated from the source of life' or 'ruined'. This argument rests on their belief in the Greek philosophical concept of the immortality of the soul. In contrast, the conditionalist case rests very strongly on their claim that in Scripture death plainly meaning death:

The Old Testament utilizes some fifty Hebrew words and seventy-five figures of speech to describe the ultimate end of the wicked, and every one sounds . . . like total extinction." A very common expression used to depict the doom of the wicked is "death" and its equivalents (e.g., to die, to be slain, etc.). Traditionalists argue that "death" simply means a "separation from God" consciously endured (a definition not given in Scripture, nor in dictionaries). Philip E. Hughes wrote: "It would be hard to imagine a concept more confusing than that of death which means existing endlessly without the power of dying." Other common words used in Scripture in referring to the doom of the lost include "destruction," being "consumed," "withering,"

“fading,” “melting away,” “being no more,” and “vanishing like smoke,” among others John Wenham has helpfully summarized the results of his extensive research into the various terms used in the New Testament in speaking of the judgment of the lost. He wrote: “I found 264 references to the fate of the lost... It is a terrible catalogue, giving most solemn warning, yet in all but one of the 264 references there is not a word about unending torment and very many of them in their natural sense clearly refer to destruction.”¹¹⁸

The conditionalist argument presents a far more convincing reading of Scripture than the traditionalist one. However, it ultimately fails because it means that the sovereignty of God is thwarted by his own creation and therefore God fails to achieve what he wants which is the salvation of everyone (1 Timothy 2:4). In addition, it does not take account of the passages of Scripture which give glimpses that death is not the last word for humanity. Christianity is a resurrection religion, but for traditionalists and conditionalists the resurrection miracle is only reserved for the minority of humanity who have put their faith in Christ before they die, whereas for restorationists this miracle is for everyone.

Core texts for restorationists therefore must inevitably include some of the great ‘all’ texts in the New Testament. Those who oppose this view will argue that ‘all’ does not always necessarily mean ‘all’ which is true. For example, Luke 4:22 says ‘All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips’. This does not mean all without exception, but much more likely ‘many spoke well of him’. This however does not in any way mean that every use of ‘all’ will always mean ‘many’. In the didactic passages of Scripture there are excellent examples of the use of ‘all’ which clearly do mean all without exception, as Thomas Talbott indicates:

In the eleventh chapter of Romans, he again wrote, “For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all” (11:32); and in the fifteenth chapter

¹¹⁸ Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 207-208

of 1 Corinthians, he also wrote, “for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ” (15:22). In each of these texts, we encounter a contrast between two universal statements, and in each case the first “all” determines the scope of the second. Accordingly, when Paul asserted in Romans 5:18 that Christ’s one “act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all,” he evidently had in mind every descendant of Adam who stands under the judgment of condemnation; when he insisted in Romans 11:32 that God is merciful to all, he had in mind every human whom God has “shut up to,” or has “imprisoned in,” disobedience; and when he asserted in 1 Corinthians 15:22 that “all will be made alive in Christ,” he had in mind everyone who dies in the first Adam. The grammatical evidence here seems utterly decisive; you can reject it only if you are prepared to reject what is right there before your eyes. And though there seems to be no shortage of those who are prepared to do just that, the arguments one actually encounters have every appearance, it seems to me, of a grasping at straws.¹¹⁹

The restorationist position takes careful account of the whole sweep of Scripture in contrast to the traditionalist or conditionalist positions, which seem to focus on a few ‘proof’ texts to make their case. Restorationists have no argument with the many judgment passages in the biblical record, nor with the idea of post-mortem punishment. They do however argue that the punishment is not endless torment or annihilation both of which leaves God’s will for the salvation of all defeated. Bishop John Robinson in his book, *In the End God*, argues that any Christian universalism must not be grounded in reason or human desire but that ‘the sole basis for such a doctrine, as more than wishful thinking, is the work of God in Christ.’¹²⁰ His Christological approach recognizes the seriousness of sin and how essential human freedom to choose Heaven or Hell is, but offers an ultimately positive picture of the nature of the love of God:

We are asked to believe that perpetually throughout eternity we must envisage the most terrible defeat of the love of God, the prospect, as it were, of the horrors of a concentration camp set in the midst of a blissful countryside. But that cannot be, without negating all God is and denying all

¹¹⁹ Thomas Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God* 2nd ed. (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2014), 55.

¹²⁰ John Robinson, *In the End God: A Study of the Christian Doctrine of the Last Things* (London: James Clarke and Co., Ltd., 1950), 109.

that in Christ he has done...Hell, so limitless to the man who has chosen it, is still bounded by the 'nevertheless' of the Divine love. And that love must win.¹²¹

When the question of universal reconciliation is mentioned in debate, people often raise the question of notoriously evil figures such as Hitler as an emotional response to the possibility of the restoration of all people in Christ. Talbott answers the often asked question with regard to the eternal fate of Hitler in the following way:

Now if we accept a doctrine of universal reconciliation, then perhaps we can also stipulate... that the final chapter of every true story includes a triumph of God's love within the context of that story. With respect to the drama of Hitler and the holocaust, for example, the final chapter of that story... will include both Hitler's heartfelt repentance and the equally heartfelt forgiveness of those whom he terrorized. However implausible such an ending may initially seem, Christians should find it no more implausible than the final reconciliation between Saul of Tarsus and those Christians whom he at one time had terrorized.¹²²

According to the restorationist perspective God's final judgment and consequent punishment of the wicked is ultimately for the purpose of restoration, even for people like Hitler who have caused such untold misery and death in their lives.

3.3 Alternative Approaches to Election and Freewill

Crucial to a critique of the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked, is a recognition of the theological debate surrounding the intention of God with regard to the salvation of the world and the part humans are understood to play in their own eternal destiny. Those denominations who teach that all are predestined for either Heaven or Hell, have supported the traditional view of endless punishment

¹²¹ Ibid., 122.

¹²² Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 211.

for the reprobate. For Arminian denominations, the traditional view of endless punishment for those who fail to put their faith in Christ is also the most supported perspective. However, if all humankind are the predestined elect, then the long accepted tradition with regard to endless punishment is in jeopardy.

In the longstanding controversy with regard to predestination, election and freewill encompassing the theological perspectives of Augustine, Pelagius, Origen, Calvin, Arminius, Wesley, Barth and many others, The Salvation Army has always been firmly in favour of the freewill perspective represented by Arminius, albeit the Wesleyan version of Arminianism which tried to avoid Pelagianism at all costs.

David Taylor in his book *Like a Mighty Army*, which was an outcome of his doctoral thesis on the theology of The Salvation Army, comments on its Wesleyan origins:

The Salvation Army draws its understanding of salvation broadly from John Wesley, albeit mediated through holiness revivalism. Booth adopted carte blanche the doctrinal formulations of the Methodist New Connexion. He would have recognized in broad terms, and “in the perspective of Protestant history” Henry Rack’s summary of Wesley’s attempt “to reconcile the notion of a salvation that depends on a divine act of grace to save fallen men with a desire for a positive and progressive attitude towards a recreation of the personality by a progressive realization of the mind of Christ in which men can take an active part.” His attempt was shaped by his lifelong opposition to what he saw as Calvinistic determinism, predestination, unconditional election and limited atonement. A year before his death Wesley wrote, “I still witness the same confession... The sum of all is this; the God of love is willing to save all the souls that he has made.”¹²³

Our Wesleyan Arminian heritage is outlined in doctrine number six, ‘We believe that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved.’¹²⁴ In the latest Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine an explanation of this doctrine is briefly given and the

¹²³ David Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 159.

¹²⁴ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, xv.

Calvinism versus Arminianism arguments are outlined. John Calvin is quoted from

The Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 3 Chapter 21:

‘By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he determined with himself whatever he wished to happen with regard to every man. All are not created on equal terms, but some are preordained to eternal life, others to eternal damnation; and, accordingly, as each has been created for one or other of these ends, we say that he has been predestined to life or to death.’¹²⁵

In his lecture at the Karl Barth conference in Princeton University in 2015, Jürgen

Moltmann states ‘that the almighty God should from eternity choose one person

and damn the other is a hellish message. What it evokes is not faith, but it is

fatalism. This is a cruel and arbitrary God who plunges human beings into the

torments of hell by making them ask ‘am I among the elect?’¹²⁶ However, from the

era of Augustine there have been those that have argued that Scripture teaches

that God, in his sovereign will, elects some people for everlasting life in Heaven and

others for an eternity in Hell. There are, of course, passages in the Bible that would

seem to support this concept, such as Romans 8:29-30 ‘For those whom he

foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order

that he might be the firstborn within a large family. And those whom he

predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those

whom he justified he also glorified.’ The determinist reading of the eternal fates of

humanity in Scripture, taught by Augustine of Hippo and much later by Calvin, has

always been refuted by those who want to emphasize the necessity of human

freedom to choose or reject the salvation offered by Christ. Many have wrestled

with the apparent dichotomy between divine election and freewill throughout

¹²⁵ Ibid., 140.

¹²⁶ <http://moltmanniac.com/predestination-karl-barths-doctrine-of-the-election-of-grace-audio-video-notes-from-moltmanns-kbc2015-lecture/>

Church history. The 2010 *Handbook of Doctrine* in its section on election and freewill notes the tension between Anabaptists and Calvinist in the sixteenth century:

Calvinistic teaching of election and predestination, and consequently of a limited atonement, produced a strong adverse reaction especially amongst Anabaptists, the most radical group of the 16th century reformers. The fullest expression of that Anabaptist reaction was found in the work of Jacobus Arminius (1560-1609). He believed that Christ died for all of humankind and not only for the elect. 'It cannot be said, "Faith is bestowed on the elect, or on those who are to be saved," but that "believers are elected and saved.'" These views, which were developed by theologians of the Dutch Reformed Church, became known as Arminianism and were later largely adopted by the Wesleyan teaching in which Salvation Army doctrine has its roots. For Arminians, all who believe in Jesus Christ are predestined to salvation.¹²⁷

This view that all who believe in Christ are predestined to salvation is the classic Arminian response to passages of Scripture such as Roman 8:29-30. This perspective gave the impetus to persuade as many people as possible to believe in Jesus Christ and was wholeheartedly embraced by the first generation of Salvationists. Again the 2010 Handbook states the importance of this doctrine to The Salvation Army:

The benefits brought about by the death of Jesus are not limited to a chosen elect, since through grace it is possible for anyone to respond to the offer of salvation through the death of Christ on the Cross. The possibility of salvation for 'the whosoever' is foundational to The Salvation Army's belief, history and ongoing mission. It must be seen to be a core motivating factor in Army policies, programmes and pastoral concern.¹²⁸

At the heart of the debate is the issue as to whether God predestined some of his image bearing creation to endless punishment after they die as Augustine and Calvin have argued. The counter argument is that God loves all of his creation and

¹²⁷ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine* 2010, 140.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 142.

bestows upon humanity the loving gift of real freedom, the freedom which inevitably leads to the possibility of rejecting eternal bliss if they so choose. This has been the basic position that Arminius, Wesley, and Methodist denominations have argued against Augustine's theology of double predestination. Is the grace of God irresistible and not at all dependent on human decision as Augustine argues? Or is grace prevenient but resistible and salvation dependent upon a freely chosen decision as is claimed by Arminian theology?

This debate, as to whether we have any part to play in our own salvation, or whether it is solely dependent on the sovereign will of God has always divided the Church. Those who believe in election accuse those who believe in free will of placing far too great an emphasis on human decision and autonomy, leaving them in danger of succumbing to the heresy of Pelagianism, which if taken to its logical conclusion would lead to the belief that humans can earn their own salvation. Arminian theologians argue that the Augustinian doctrine famously advocated by Calvin, inevitably means that Christ did not die for all, but only for a limited elite. These chosen ones are unable to reject salvation, even if they wanted to, because it is the sovereign will of God that they should be saved. Salvationists have always argued that this is a grotesque reading of the gospel which should be good news for whoever will respond to it

The ground breaking work of Karl Barth in the twentieth century means that any arguments surrounding predestination and free will must take account of his work. In chapter 7 of volume II.2 of his *Church Dogmatics*, entitled *The Election of God*, Barth unfolds a powerful rebuttal of Calvin's theology of predestination which has

proved to be so problematical for many over the ensuing generations. In the opening statement Barth sets out his understanding of the election of grace:

The doctrine of election is the sum of the Gospel because of all words that can be said or heard it is the best: that God elects man; that God is for man too the One who loves in freedom. It is grounded in the knowledge of Jesus Christ because He is both the electing God and elected man in One. It is part of the doctrine of God because originally God's election of man is a predestination not merely of man but of Himself. Its function is to bear basic testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God.¹²⁹

Barth's argument, in which Jesus Christ is both the elector and the elected, cuts to the core of what for many causes disquiet in Calvin's scheme. Calvin's view, that divine decree in eternity chose some for endless bliss and others for endless punishment, cannot be recognised in the life, teaching, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As Barth rightly argues, 'All the dubious features of Calvin's doctrine result from the basic failing that in the last analysis he separates God and Jesus Christ, thinking that what was in the beginning with God must be sought elsewhere than in Jesus Christ.'¹³⁰ It can be argued that Barth's critique of Calvinism is also relevant to the Arminianism of Salvationists. Perhaps Arminianism fails to see that Jesus Christ, through his suffering and death, not only secures the salvation of the few who by faith freely choose him, but that, according to Barth, he is the electing and suffering God who predestines all humankind for salvation:

Predestination means that from all eternity God has determined upon man's acquittal at His own cost. It means that God has ordained that in the place of the one acquitted He himself should be perishing and abandoned and rejected, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world...when we look into the innermost recesses of the divine good pleasure, predestination is the non-rejection of man.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: Volume II The Doctrine of God part 2*, trans. G. Bromiley, J. Campbell, I. Wilson, J. Strathearn McNab, H. Knight, R. Stewart. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd., 1957), 3.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 111.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 167.

The dilemma for Salvationists and others remains. It is vital to argue that freedom of choice is foundational for an understanding of what it is to be human and yet we are faced with a gracious, loving creator who, according to Barth, has determined to acquit and save us. Whilst there have been theologians such as Origen who attempt to reconcile predestination and freewill, for others it seems mistaken to abandon an insistence on freewill. Yet from Scripture it seems equally impossible to question the predestined determination of God to achieve reconciliation with humankind. Taylor commends a careful study of Barth's theology of election as a way forward for this theological quandary faced by Salvationists who may question their Arminian heritage:

Dialogue with Barth, equally, affords Salvationists the opportunity to engage with what Eugene Rogers calls Barth's "marvelous reworking of the doctrine of election, in which Barth makes it safe to be a Calvinist again." Central to his account, in a way that distinguishes it from Wesley, is Barth's objection to the possibility that a theological understanding of the word freedom might be conceived as an individual's free-will ability to choose evil. In this respect Barth's theological anthropology in election and subsequently in justification and sanctification, attempts a dialectical account of divine and human agency in precedence and subsequence, that Salvationists must ultimately weigh against Wesley's account of a "measure of free-will supernaturally restored," in which as Rack suggests, the individual "can take an active part."...For Barth, prevenient grace is the free gift of God eternally self-determined in election and objectively actualized in the atoning death and resurrection of Christ, prior to its subjective realization by the Spirit in human lives. Against Wesley, Barth is concerned to highlight grace as God's free gift for the person's freedom to respond obediently to Christ, rather than free-will ability to accept or reject Christ. For Barth, this rejection is a contradiction of God's grace which he will not discount, but will equally not characterize as freedom.¹³²

Barth's understanding of election and freewill does offer an alternative way for The Salvation Army, which has always had the dissatisfying dilemma of needing to believe that however much the sovereign and otherwise omnipotent God may long for the eternal salvation of his beloved children, he is unable to secure it for the

¹³² David Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army*, 162.

vast majority of people, who exercise their graciously given freedom in a way that will have terrible eternal consequences for them.

The ongoing *Pistis Christou* debate amongst theologians sheds useful light on the election versus freewill debate especially in the light of the Barthian emphatic insistence on the election of humanity only through the particularity of Jesus Christ, the faithful Messiah. At the heart of the argument is whether we are saved by faith *in* Christ or by the faith *of* Christ. In other words, is our forgiveness potential or actual, does it depend on something we have to do, i.e. have faith. In the instances of this phrase in the New Testament the text could be read either way, although most English translations have opted for 'faith in Christ'. In his exegesis of Romans 3:22, one of the classic texts with regard to this issue, N.T. Wright makes it clear that he reads the text in terms of the faithfulness of Christ:

Once we understand Christos as the Messiah, Israel's representative, Israel-in-person if you will, the logic works out immaculately. (a) The covenant God promises to rescue and bless the world through Israel. (b) Israel as it stands is faithless to this commission. (c) The covenant God, however, is faithful, and will provide a faithful Israelite, the 'faithful Israelite', the Messiah. It is the tight coherence of this train of thought, rather than any verbal arguments about subjects and objects, prepositions and case-endings on the one hand, or preferential theological positions on the other, that persuaded me many years ago that Romans 3:22 speaks of the Messiah's faithfulness. It persuades me still.¹³³

Wright and other influential theologians who advocate this 'new perspective' argue convincingly, that the more Christological focussed, subjective genitive reading of verses such as Romans 3:22 fits more fully with the whole metanarrative of Scripture than the objective genitive which emphasises the importance of human belief. In the subjective view, the one faithful Israelite Jesus achieved what

¹³³ N.T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: SPCK, 2013), 839.

unfaithful Israel could not achieve, in Wrights words ‘rescuing the world from *hamartia*’.¹³⁴ This view does not negate human response as Wright points out. ‘because *pistis*, faithfulness, (a) always was supposed to be the badge of Israel, (b) now has become the badge of Jesus, and so (c) is the appropriate badge, the only badge, by which Jesus’ followers are to be marked out.’¹³⁵ This is not irresistible grace, nor salvation by works, but a flow of grateful, loving orthopraxy, a faithful obedient response to the faithful Messiah who ‘takes away the sin of the world’ (John 1:29). This reading seems far more satisfying than the centuries old seesaw alternatives of arbitrary election or a dependence on right belief for salvation. If Augustine and Calvin are right then God is sovereign but God cannot be a loving creator of all humankind in any meaningful sense because he only saves the elect. If Arminianism is right then God is love, and loves all his creation but cannot possibly be sovereign, since he does not get what he wants, because he is dependent on humankind believing and responding in the right way.

A reimagined election understands all to be elected because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ who chooses to elect everyone because he freely and graciously loves humankind and has the power and wisdom to achieve what he wills. A reimagined freewill recognizes the biblical picture, seen in many passages of Scripture, in which God is seen not only as the most passionate and effective missionary but also the most loving, in the midst of his beloved creation. God will ultimately win all the lost without coercion, force, or against their freewill. Those who argue that this is a logical impossibility, even for God, are encouraged to embrace the theological

¹³⁴ Ibid., 840.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

imagination necessary to comprehend the infinitely creative missionary capacity of their creator, “For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible’.

(Matthew 19:26) Talbott helpfully points out that this apparent dichotomy can be reconciled with thoughtful theological reflection. He illustrates this using his picture of the chess master:

When a grandmaster plays a novice, it is foreordained, so to speak, that the grandmaster will win, not because he or she causally determines the novice’s every move or even predicts each one of them; the end is foreordained because the grandmaster is resourceful enough to counter any combination of moves that the novice will in fact freely decide to make. And similarly, for the infinitely wise and resourceful God. He has no need to exercise direct causal control over our individual choices in order to “checkmate” us in the end; he can allow us to choose freely, perhaps even protect us from some ill-advised choices for a while, and still undermine over time every conceivable motive we might have for rejecting his grace. For once we learn for ourselves, after many trials and tribulations, in some cases, why separation from God is an objective horror and why union with him is the only thing that can satisfy our deepest yearnings and desires, all resistance to his grace will melt away like wax before a flame.¹³⁶

The illustration of the chess master gives a glimpse into the ingenuity of our creator and helps us understand that we do not have to choose, as Augustinians and Arminians always have to, between a God who is sovereign but does not love all his creation or a God who loves his creation but is powerless to save them all. Although it is obvious that God’s loving ways do not always win in this world, in the ultimate and eternal sense, his love will not fail. (1 Corinthians 13:8) No picture can ever be comprehensive with regard to the divine nature but this illustration of the chess master at least allows us to glimpse how both the freewill of humankind and the sovereignty of the omnipotent and determinedly loving God can be upheld in his relationship with and ultimate purpose for the freely lived lives of all humankind.

¹³⁶ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 194.

This view of sovereignty and freewill working together for the salvation of all is hinted at in passages such as Romans 11:32 'For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.' For scholars who interpret this verse as to mean all sorts of people rather than all people without exception, Talbott has this to say:

The grammatical evidence here seems utterly decisive; you can reject it only if you are prepared to reject what is right there before your eyes. And though there seems to be no shortage of those who are prepared to do just that, the arguments one actually encounters have every appearance, it seems to me, of a grasping at straws.¹³⁷

In this reconciled understanding of election and freewill, however much humankind continues to disobey the law of love whilst living in the 'prison' of freewill, the creative and wise missionary God revealed in Scripture through the faithful Messiah Jesus, ultimately will not fail to bring about reconciliation and peace for all. 'For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.' (Colossians 1:20)

This is a genuine challenge to traditional Arminian theology as Tom Gregg in *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation* points out:

One is left wondering why, if the majority of humanity is destined to eternal separation from God, God has created the world in the first instance. The idea by this account that creation is connected to the graciousness of God seems illogical: surely the whole of humanity being saved by grace is no less gracious than only a section of humanity being saved. Secondly, to consider annihilation or conditional immortality a non-violent image in comparison to hell is utterly absurd. To annihilate someone or some group is a grossly violent act, to which a post-Holocaust age should be sensitive. Moreover, all of these images (annihilation, hell, and conditional immortality) still all rest at some level on the motivating factor of fear. In response to the idea that such concepts are the only way to retain the necessary possibility of

¹³⁷ Ibid., 55.

freedom for a human, one can hardly imagine that, faced with the choice of hell or some form of annihilation, in the light of the knowledge of these realities in comparison to an eternity with God, anyone would genuinely choose annihilation or hell freely.¹³⁸

Greggs is right to point out that annihilation is a grossly violent act, incompatible with the graciousness of God, but what Salvationists are called upon to believe and teach is even more terrible. The logical conclusion of Arminian theology together with our doctrine of Hell is that because God is unable to secure the salvation of everyone, those who fail to respond to the gospel, will inevitably suffer endless punishment. Perriman reflects on the dangerous implications of both Calvinist and Arminian theology in the way they distort a clear understanding of the nature of God and his soteriological purpose for all humankind:

It is, after all, only a short step from stating that God wills eternal terror for those opposed to His will and uses that terror to keep people on the path, to justifying the use of terror in the world among those understood to be against God's will in order to influence their decision-making in the present. Salvation needs, therefore, to be expressed in a way which does not divide humanity into binary groupings, but which allows for a simultaneous discussion of the salvific plan of God for all humanity as well as those who profess faith. In an age of multiculturalism in which our neighbours are people of many faiths and none, this is of paramount importance. The division of humanity into saved or damned, elect or reject, awaiting heaven or hell is not only dangerous in its implications for the way in which humanity is seen, but it is also dangerous in terms of its doctrine of God: it presents a doctrine of God in which the will of God is separated from His love, or else is flouted by the sinful choices of humans, or else is cajoled into conditional love (which is no love at all) by the faith of humans... God is salvation: it is not simply an action He performs; this action is an act in which one can understand His being. Thus, the contrary is also true: if one fails to understand salvation, one will fail to understand God.¹³⁹

Shameful events in Church history such as the Crusades and the Inquisition, uphold Perriman's hypothesis that a doctrine in which God is willing to inflict terror on the

¹³⁸ Tom Greggs, *Barth, Origen, and Universal Salvation: Restoring Particularity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), x.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

damned is not only dangerous but is also increasingly untenable. A doctrine of Hell together with an Arminian theology is problematic in that it leaves us with a loving but weak God who cannot be sovereign in his own universe. In *God will be All in All*, edited by Richard Bauckham, Jürgen Moltmann writes a chapter called *The Logic of Hell* in which, amongst other things, he argues incisively against what he sees as the anthropocentric nature of Arminian theology:

The logic of hell seems to me not merely inhumane but also extremely atheistic: here the human being in his freedom of choice is his own lord and god. His own will is his heaven, or his hell. God is merely the accessory who puts that will into effect. If I decide for heaven, God must put me there; if I decide for hell, he has to leave me there. If God has to abide by our free decision, then we can do with him what we like. Is that 'the love of God'? Free human beings forge their own happiness and are their own executioners. They do not just dispose over their own lives here; they decide on their eternal destinies as well. So, they have no need of any God at all. After a God has perhaps created us free as we are, he leaves us to our fate. Carried to this ultimate conclusion, the logic of hell is secular humanism, as Feuerbach, Marx and Nietzsche already perceived a long time ago.¹⁴⁰

In the final paragraph of this chapter Moltmann sums up his critique of Arminian theology. 'Love is God's compassion for the lost. Transforming grace is God's punishment for sinners. It is not the right to choose that defines the reality of human freedom. It is the doing of the good.'¹⁴¹

If, as is argued here, Arminianism has failed Salvationism, then I would contend that classical Augustinian Calvinism is not the place to turn to, even if traditionally it has been the main alternative to the Arminian perspective. Talbott critiques the deep fault line that lies at the heart of this theology of limited atonement and particular election when he says:

¹⁴⁰ Jürgen Moltmann, 1999. 'The Logic of Hell' In *God will be All in All: The Eschatology of Jürgen Moltmann*, edited by Richard Bauckham, 45. Edinburgh: T & T Clark.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 47.

It seems that the Augustinians have embraced a logical impossibility. The idea that God loves some created persons but not all, or that he divides the human race into the elect and the non-elect, is, I contend, necessarily false. For even if, as Calvin insisted, the proposition God is love does not express a truth about the essence of God, even if God could have chosen not to love us, he could not choose to love some of us without also choosing to love all of us. The reason, as I have said, has to do with the inclusive nature of love, the way in which it binds people's interests together. For any two people you choose, either they will themselves be united in a bond of love, each willing the best for the other, or they will not be so united. If they are so united, then God cannot will the best for one of them without willing the best for the other as well. But even if they are not so united, God still cannot will the good for one of them unless he also wills that his loved one become the kind of person who is filled with love for, and therefore wills the best for, all others. And God cannot will all of that, I contend, cannot both will the best for someone and will that his loved one be the kind of person who wills the best for all others, unless God himself wills the best for all others as well. Hence God cannot love one person unless he loves all other persons as well.¹⁴²

The doctrine of election, in which God selects a chosen people to pour out his love and grace upon, has offended the natural instincts and the sense of justice of many, and Talbott's analysis illuminates the final illogical impossibility of this terrible dogma. Although for most Salvationists Arminianism has been a better theological framework than Augustinian predestinarian elitism, it has in reality simply been the lesser of the two evils in that we have not imagined any theological alternative to a sovereign but arbitrary God or a loving but weak God. In the theology of Karl Barth, in which all are elected in the particularity of Jesus Christ, we have just such an alternative theological framework. Whilst many Salvationists may struggle to reconsider their Arminian heritage, surely a theology which upholds both the sovereignty and omnibenevolence of God must give cause to rethink our long held tradition. Taylor encourages us to do so when he says:

Salvationists should reflect upon Barth's account of election, as it charts a new way forward; one that he believes avoids the errors of both Calvin's *decretum absolutum* and an Arminian account of co-operating freewill that focuses too heavily upon human decision, from a position of apparent freedom. Barth strikes a positive note: 'The doctrine of the election is the sum of the Gospel...Its function is to bear basic

¹⁴² Ibid., 128-129.

testimony to eternal, free and unchanging grace as the beginning of all the ways and works of God.’¹⁴³

In this Barthian soteriology, the good news that The Salvation Army has faithfully proclaimed for over one hundred and fifty years, at last becomes unconditionally good and good for everyone. The ‘all’ texts of the New Testament, for so long dismissed by convinced Calvinists and difficult to comprehend by those who have struggled with Arminian theology, become clear and reasonable and salvation for all without exception is understood as Scriptural:

The Pauline idea of inclusive election, the idea that the elect are chosen instruments through whom God’s mercy will eventually reach those who have stumbled, sets Paul squarely against a temptation as old as religion itself: the temptation to distinguish between the favoured few, to which, of course, we belong, and everyone else.¹⁴⁴

For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. (1 Corinthians 15: 21-22)

A high Christology, together with a generous, open soteriology beyond the stale parameters of Calvinism or Arminianism, could encourage a reimagined and renewed motivation for the mission of The Salvation Army in the twenty first century. Thoughtful Salvationists, believing in the love of God for all humanity and spending their lives pursuing justice for the poorest in society, are faced with the demotivating injustice of Arminian theology together with the doctrine of endless punishment. In this framework, at death the God of justice who loves all of humanity, becomes a wrathful judge who is willing and able to make the unrepentant suffer torturously, in a completely disproportionate and infinite way, as a punishment for failing to repent of the finite sins they committed regardless of the circumstance of their short lives.

¹⁴³ David Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army*, 154-155

¹⁴⁴ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 115.

This theological framework necessitates an incongruous understanding of divine punishment as MacDonald points out:

Central to the retributive theory of punishment is the notion that the punishment must fit the crime. A punishment too lenient or too harsh does not serve the cause of justice. But it is here that the problem lies. According to the traditional doctrine, hell is everlasting, conscious torment. What possible crime is a finite human capable of committing that would be justly punished in this way? Many find the idea absurd, because it is hard to see how even the most hideous crimes humans commit could be balanced by the traditional eternal punishing. The upshot of this is that the traditional doctrine seems to require a theory of punishment that ends up undermining it.¹⁴⁵

MacDonald raises questions that did not seem to surface in the evangelistic fervour of early Salvationism. It has to be said from reading early publications that Salvation Army soteriology and eschatology was simply a reflection of the widespread evangelical theology of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and was not the result of the theological reflection of the small group of founders of the new movement. The founders of The Salvation Army were very influenced by the nuanced soteriology of John Wesley, who attempted to uphold both the doctrine of total depravity and human responsibility by means of the doctrine of supernatural prevenient grace:

According to Albert Outler, Wesley's *ordo salutis* begins with prevenient grace, in which a relationship with God is progressively deepened through convincing (convicting), justifying, sanctifying and glorifying grace. Most importantly, against the espousal of unconditional election, prevenient grace is Wesley's explanation of how God restores a measure of freewill in sinful human lives. Mankind does not possess an inherent power of choice for, "natural free-will, in the present state of mankind, I do not understand: I only assert, that there is a measure of free-will supernaturally restored to every man, together with that supernatural light which 'enlightens every man that cometh into the world'." In this sense Wesley affirmed that the Spirit "which waiteth not for the call of men," brings irresistible prevenient grace, awakening people totally depraved, by "opening the eyes of our understanding and enlightening us." Yet critically, this irresistible restoration of human faculties and senses can ultimately be resisted by the person who chooses to ignore or oppose such an awakening. Wesleyan scholars refute charges of

¹⁴⁵ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 11.

Pelagianism against Wesley's view of human co-operation. Outler, in introducing Wesley's sermon "On Working Out Our Own Salvation," declares that "if there were ever a question as to Wesley's alleged Pelagianism, this sermon alone should suffice to dispose of it decisively." McGonigle agrees that with the doctrines of original sin and prevenient grace... as the twin theological foci of John Wesley's scheme of salvation... his doctrine of prevenient grace enabled him to assert human responsibility while totally rejecting all forms of Pelagianism.¹⁴⁶

This Wesleyan Arminianism was motivational for the founders of the movement, and went some way in attempting to grapple with issues such as irresistible grace. Read argues that Catherine Booth understood this, and her theological stance was that:

Without prevenient grace, humanity is entirely hopeless. Crucially in *Saving Faith* Catherine, speaking of seekers in her congregation who she believes are longing for deliverance and striving against sin, argues that this is a sign of prevenient grace working in them.¹⁴⁷

However, this understanding of prevenient grace does not seem to have been well disseminated or even encouraged in the early Salvation Army. The revivalist ethos of the need for personal evangelism, together with a strong emphasis on the responsibility of the individual to repent, resulted in a somewhat oversimplification, which was sometimes summarised crudely as 'turn or burn'. It is somewhat surprising that there is no mention of prevenient grace in any official handbook of doctrine until the 2010 publication:

Wesley's theology included a distinctively optimistic understanding of the workings of God's grace before one is born again, that which theologians term 'prevenient' grace. He could not agree with the pessimistic view he found in Augustine and Calvin, that fallen man is nothing but evil desire, that only the elect can be saved, that they are saved by God's irresistible grace, and that grace for salvation is available to them alone. Neither could he agree with the opposite, unrealistically optimistic Pelagian view of human nature, that humankind is born with a natural capacity for choosing good or evil. Wesley held that because of their fallen nature, humans are powerless to choose good or evil solely on their own. However, all humans benefit from God's prevenient grace...thus, grace is available before coming to Christ. Through this grace

¹⁴⁶ Taylor, *Like a Mighty Army*, 161-162.

¹⁴⁷ Read, *Catherine Booth*, 49.

humans are enabled to choose good, and ultimately by faith to accept God's saving grace. Salvation by grace through faith begins then with preventing, or prevenient or enabling grace, grace which can be resisted by freewill, but if accepted, becomes the beginning of the path to salvation.¹⁴⁸

Perhaps Salvationists of earlier generations were so caught up in rescuing as many people as possible from Hell that they did not engage in theological reflection on the nature of their Wesleyan Arminian heritage. It seems likely that it was also the case that the leaders of the movement did not believe their priority was to concern themselves with teaching anything other than the broad sweep of the theological basis of their activism. It would seem then from the 2010 Handbook of Doctrine that the official Salvationist view of prevenient grace, is after all, not so very far from the Augustinian doctrine of the total depravity of humankind necessitating irresistible grace, if any at all are to be saved. It is the issue of the nature of freewill that still divides the two perspectives, prevenient grace can be resisted whilst irresistible grace, as the word suggests, cannot. If, as is proposed, Salvationists could embrace a Barthian view of election for all, which resonates so much more readily with the Scriptural view of the universal love of God than limited election, then the concept of freewill can be reimagined, as for example in the writing of Thomas Talbott:

So even if a loving God could sometimes permit murder, he could never permit one person to annihilate the soul of another or to destroy the very possibility of future happiness in another; and even if he could sometimes permit suicide, he could never permit his loved ones to destroy the very possibility of future happiness in themselves either. Just as loving parents are prepared to restrict the freedom of the children they love, so a loving God would be prepared to restrict the freedom of the children he loves, at least in cases of truly irreparable harm. The only difference is that God deals with a much larger picture and a much longer time frame than that with which human parents are immediately concerned.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, 123-124.

¹⁴⁹ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 177-178.

In this understanding of election and freewill, the prevenient grace of God is working in the lives of all of humanity to enable transformation, reconciliation and the flourishing of all creation.

3.4 Alternative Approaches to the Biblical Material

The question as to what extent the doctrine of endless punishment is supported in the biblical material will now be addressed. Seen through the lenses of nineteenth century conservative evangelicalism, it would be dismissed as a ridiculous question to engage with. They saw this doctrine throughout Scripture, whilst today it is much more questionable. There are still those who would robustly defend the traditional doctrine of Hell and see it woven throughout the bible. Robert Yarbrough in his chapter 'Jesus on Hell' in *Hell Under Fire* does indeed see in the biblical material a rich source of support for the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked:

Christ's teaching on hell... draws persuasive force from its basis in the Old Testament witness and not only from the scattered references to the actual word "hell"... The one who came down from heaven to reveal God (John 4:13) corrected views about the age to come (e.g., in the case of the Sadducees) when they were out of sync with a proper understanding of the Old Testament. But Christ did not set aside or change, he merely purified, clarified, extended, and intensified, Old Testament views of redemption and judgment that existed in various forms among the Jewish sects of his time and stretched back for many centuries.¹⁵⁰

The claim by Yarbrough that Christ's teaching on Hell purifies, clarifies, extends and intensifies what is taught on this subject in the Old Testament cannot be left without scrutiny. Rather than forming the firm foundation for Christ's teaching on Hell, the evidence is rather that Old Testament teaching on the endless punishment

¹⁵⁰ Yarbrough, Robert. 2007. 'Jesus on Hell' In *Hell Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents Eternal Punishment*, edited by Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, 77. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.

of the wicked after death is almost completely absent. Throughout the Old Testament it is death that is consistently presented as the penalty for sin, not endless punishment after death. In the account of Adam and Eve's fall in Genesis the warning with regard to the penalty for disobedience was 'of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. (Genesis 2:17) rather than, 'you will be condemned to endless punishment when you die'. This silence with regard to the possibility of post-mortem punishment continues to be the case throughout the Old Testament with very few exceptions, the most explicit of which is Isaiah 66:24 'And they shall go forth and look on the dead bodies of the men that have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.' and Daniel 12:2 'Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt'. It would seem that these verses support endless punishment after death, but even here there is abhorrence, shame and contempt rather than any explicit reference to endless punishment which might be expected if this doctrine is rooted in the Old Testament. In his comments on Daniel 12:2 Edward Fudge quotes some distinguished theologians and accuses them of blatant eisegesis:

Blanchard interprets the contempt to mean that "the conscience will endlessly gnaw at the sinner's soul". Foregoing exegesis, Calvin also explained "the plain meaning" to be "that the wicked shall have a bad conscience as an executioner, to torment them without end. . . and finally, that they shall tremble and be agitated in a dreadful and shocking manner, as if a worm were gnawing the heart of a man, or a fire were consuming it, and yet thus consumed, he did not die". Luther also makes the worm "the bite of the conscience," an interpretation that Augustine had suggested. Here the Reformers engage in blatant eisegesis, reading into Scripture from their own imagination something that is not there.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 80.

To support a critique of the traditional view that Daniel 12:2 supports post-mortem punishment, there is the question of the meaning of the Hebrew word *ōlam* which is translated 'everlasting' in this verse. It is suggested that the word is derived from a verb meaning to hide or conceal and came to mean an indefinite amount of time, past or future, short or long. Professor James Orr, an evangelical and fundamentalist theologian of the nineteenth century, in his entry for 'Eternity' in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states:

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *ōlam* is used for "eternity," sometimes in the sense of unlimited duration, sometimes in the sense of a cycle or an age, and sometimes, in later Hebrew, in the signification of world. The Hebrew *ōlam* has, for its proper New Testament equivalent, *aiōn*, as signifying either time of particular duration, or the unending duration of time in general. Only the Hebrew term primarily signified unlimited time, and only in a secondary sense represented a definite or specific period. Both the Hebrew and the Greek terms signify the world itself, as it moves in time.¹⁵²

In Isaiah 42:14 'For a long time I have kept silent' it is a long time in the past. In Jonah 2:6 '...at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.' it is a short time in the past. In Joshua 8:28 'So Joshua burned Ai, and made it for ever a heap of ruins, as it is to this day' *ōlam* means a long time into the future. Finally, in Psalm 9:7 'But the LORD sits enthroned for ever, he has established his throne for judgement.' The context suggests the word *ōlam* is being used much more like the usage of the English word 'forever'. All English Bibles have 'everlasting' or 'eternal' for *ōlam* in Daniel 12:2 except Young's literal translation which has 'age-during'. It

¹⁵² Orr, James. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* 'Eternity', accessed November 15, 2014, <http://www.internationalstandardbible.com/>

can be seen from this brief examination of the word *ōlam* that Daniel 12:2 can hardly support the case for endless punishment with these verses.

In addition to the absence of reference to endless punishment In the Old Testament, there is the question of the meaning of *Sheol*. The Hebrew word *Sheol* occurs sixty five times in the Hebrew Old Testament and is translated with the word *Hadēs* in the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament written three hundred years before the Christian era. Most scholars agree that *Sheol* and *Hadēs* are more or less equivalent and nearly always mean the grave or the abode of the dead, a shadowy unspecific underworld where all, regardless of moral worth, go to after death. The Evangelical Alliance commission on the nature of Hell comments:

Very occasionally, an alternative to the underworld is suggested. Two Old Testament characters, for instance, avoided death: 'God took Enoch away' and 'Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind' (Genesis 5:24, 2 Kings 2:11). But these events never function as exemplary models for psalmists, prophets or sages. A few psalmists are so excited by their present communion with God that they believe it will continue after death in some unspecified form (Psalm 16:10, 49:15 [contrast verse 7], 73:24). This however, is a step of faith, and no further details are given. Besides, these texts are exceptions. Most other psalmists who mention death expect it to be the end.¹⁵³

Neither *Sheol* nor *Hadēs* carry the meaning of Hell as it has come to be understood in the Christian tradition. According to *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, *Sheol* is derived from the verb 'to be extinguished'¹⁵⁴ the dictionary goes on to state 'the English translation 'Hell' is misleading' ¹⁵⁵ but then claims that 'Later passages of the Old Testament portray *Sheol* as a place of punishment for the unrighteous' and

¹⁵³ David Hilborn, ed. *The Nature of Hell: A report by the Evangelical Alliance Commission on Unity and Truth among evangelicals*, (London: Paternoster publishing, 2000), 39.

¹⁵⁴ Jim West, 'Sheol' *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1206.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

quotes Psalm 31:17 'LORD, let the wicked be put to shame; let them go dumbfounded to *Sheol*' as an example.¹⁵⁶ This verse and a few similar verses may hint at a possible future punishment but are hardly explicit enough to support a doctrine of endless punishment. The King James version translates *Sheol* either as grave or pit twenty three times and as Hell thirty one times. Generations of congregations reading the word Hell in this translation of the Bible would immediately conjure up a picture of fire and brimstone, eternal conscious torture and all the cultural accruements associated with Hell in the Western theological tradition. Whereas in fact the *Sheol* passages of the Old Testament give nowhere near that amount of clarity with regard to the future fate of the righteous or of the unrepentant. If the traditional viewpoint is so thoroughly grounded in Scripture as theologians such as Yarbrough claim then it would be expected that the Old Testament would be much more explicit with regard to the terrible possibility of the endless punishment of the wicked, than in fact it is. Although post-mortem endless punishment for the wicked may not be explicit in the Old Testament, there are many 'terror' passages which speak of punishment, vengeance and the wrath of God. However, Richard Rohr, in an interesting reflection, notes how in the Gospels Jesus seems to critique the Hebrew Scripture he knew so well with reference to the terror passages:

Jesus teaches about the God he knows. He offers a kind of "soul language" that makes sense to as many people as possible. Many of the citations he uses are from extra-biblical sources, aphorisms, legends, and stories. He takes wisdom from wherever it comes. When he does quote scripture, the only Hebrew Scriptures that he quotes are those that move toward mercy and justice and inclusivity. There are scriptures that present God as punitive, imperialistic, or exclusionary, but Jesus never quotes them in his teaching. In fact, he speaks against them. The longest single citation of Jesus according to the Gospels is in Luke 4. He went into the synagogue

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 1207.

and unrolled the scroll of the prophet Isaiah and “found the place where it was written, ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.’ And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down” (Luke 4:17-20). Wait a minute! Jesus stopped reading before he finished the text! Isaiah 61:2 actually says: “to proclaim a day of vengeance from our God.” Jesus skips the last line because he isn’t here to announce vengeance. He has a completely different message, and thus critiques his own scriptures. This is quite telling. Jesus was not changing the Father’s mind about us; he was changing our mind about God, and thus about one another. If God and Jesus are not hateful, violent, punitive, interpretations torturing, or vindictive, then our excuse for the same is forever taken away from us.¹⁵⁷

The significant difference between Luke 4 and Isaiah 61 is interesting and very relevant to this study, especially when the different interpretations concerning what verses attributed to Jesus meant by some of the New Testament ‘terror’ texts used in the Gospels are analysed. However, Richard Rohr is not completely correct when he says that the gospels only quote from the mercy, justice and inclusive passages from the Old Testament. Matthew 8:11-12 ‘I tell you, many will come from East and West and will eat with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the heirs of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ is an example of a number of verses that speak of outer darkness and gnashing of teeth. Whilst in the Old Testament there are no passages that directly link outer darkness with gnashing of teeth, there are examples which allude to this and where the gnashing of teeth is linked to the fate of the wicked, for example Psalm 112:10 ‘The wicked see it and are angry; they gnash their teeth and melt away; the desire of the wicked comes to nothing. For those who uphold the doctrine of endless punishment, it is obvious

¹⁵⁷ Richard Rohr, ‘Image of God’ *Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditation*, July 8th, 2014, accessed January 25, 2015. <http://myemail.constantcontact.com/Richard-Rohr-s-Meditation--What-Jesus-Says-about-God.html?soid=1103098668616&aid=BNP5b7EWcVI>)

that they will look to the words attributed to Jesus that allude to Old Testament terror texts in support of their case. They see in the references in Matthew and Luke to the outer darkness the location of Hell and the gnashing of teeth references as evidence of the unceasing existence of the wicked after death. Fudge argues that this interpretation reads more into the texts than is actually there:

In scriptural usage the expression 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' seems to indicate two separate activities. The 'weeping' reflects the terror of the doomed as they begin to realize that God has rejected them and as they anticipate the execution of his sentence. 'Gnashing of teeth' seems to express their bitter rage and enmity toward God, who has sentenced them, and toward the redeemed, who will forever be blessed. The common assumption that 'weeping and gnashing of teeth' describes the everlasting agony of souls in conscious torment is the interpretation of a later age and lacks any clear biblical support.¹⁵⁸

This quote from Fudge would suggest that doctrinal presuppositions and Church traditions can influence the hermeneutical approaches taken with regard to certain texts. It needs to be recognised in a study such as this that interpretative objectivity is impossible to achieve when evaluating the place of the mercy texts as against the terror texts in the Old Testament. However, it is worth examining which Old Testament texts are used in the New Testament in order to establish their relative value to the early Christian community. Most of the Old Testament books are quoted in the New Testament but there are no direct quotes from the intertestamental Apocrypha which contains some of the earliest texts with regard to endless punishment. The most quoted Old Testament text in the New Testament is Leviticus 19:18 'You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD.' It is quoted eight times, mostly in the Gospels. Other Old Testament verses with multiple

¹⁵⁸ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 158.

references in the New Testament are the laws with regard to the condemnation of murder and adultery found in Exodus and Deuteronomy. It is also interesting that verses such as Hosea 6:6 and Amos 5:24 which clearly extol the values of compassion and justice are utilised in the New Testament. It is clear that the mercy texts of the Old Testament take precedence over the terror texts in the early Christian community. It can also be added that there are explicit passages in the Old Testament which seem to exclude the possibility of endless punishment after death. For example, Isaiah 26:14 'The dead do not live; *Hadēs* do not rise, because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them' and Isaiah 25:6-8 'On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food... And he will destroy on this mountain the shroud that is cast over all peoples, the sheet that is spread over all nations; he will swallow up death for ever. Then the Lord GOD will wipe away the tears from all faces, and the disgrace of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.' J.W. Hanson in *The Silence of God Concerning Hell* encapsulates the substantial challenge there is to the claim that the foundations of the doctrine of endless punishment are to be discovered in the Old Testament:

The Almighty Father of the human family would not fail, at the very beginning of human history, to announce to his children the penalty of sin. To conceal such a doom as that of endless torment from any would be cruel treachery towards those whom he had created, and who would have the right to know all the consequences of disobedience. And yet only limited consequences, temporal punishments, were threatened at the announcement of the law to Adam, or when the penalty of their Sin was referred to, in the history of the earliest transgressors. If endless punishment were true, it would be stated as the threatened penalty of the original sin.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ J.W. Hanson, 'The Silence of God Concerning Hell,' accessed March 19, 2015, <http://www.ecclesia.org/truth/silence.html>.

Having examined the relevant material in the Old Testament which may at first sight support the doctrine of endless punishment, an exploration of the intertestamental writings will now be undertaken in order to determine if more clarity on this issue will be evident. The canonicity of some of these writings is disputed, with both Roman Catholic and the Eastern Orthodox Churches accepting some deuterocanonical, intertestamental material, whilst Protestants claim these as apocryphal and only accept canonicity for the thirty nine books found in the Hebrew canon known as the Tanakh which in Protestantism is called the Old Testament. Fudge has undertaken a very careful study of many of these intertestamental writings and finds in the book of Judith the first undisputable reference to endless punishment:

This tale of a heroic Jewish maiden who saves her people from an enemy general called holofernes might come from 150-25 BC though the date is disputed. At the end of the story the heroine, Judith, leads Israel in a great song of victory over their former oppressor. Her closing words warn: "Woe to the nations that rise up against my race. The Lord Almighty will take vengeance against them in the day of judgment, to put fire and worms in their flesh; and they will weep and feel their pain forever" (Judith 16:17). The fire and worms probably come from Isaiah 66:24, but now the transition Sirach hinted at is fully brought to pass. This language is unmistakable. It describes the traditionalist hell. In all the Old Testament's inspired pictures of the wicked, historical, poetic, or prophetic, we have not encountered this scene even once. We have not found this clear picture of unending conscious torment in the apocryphal material until now. This passage in Judith marks its first unequivocal appearance in our literature.¹⁶⁰

Fudge goes on to examine the Dead Sea Scrolls and a variety of pseudepigrapha including the book of 1 Enoch which is another rich source of endless punishment material. 'It is said that sinners "will cry and make lamentation in a place that is a chaotic wilderness, and in the fire they will burn; for there is no earth there." An angel describes the scene as the place where "the spirits of sinners and blasphemers are discarded, and of

¹⁶⁰ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 89-90.

those who work wickedness” (1 Enoch 108:3–6). The passage also has “their names ...blotted out of the book of life,” “their posterity destroyed forever,” and “their spirits...slaughtered,””¹⁶¹ Gregg, in his description of the intertestamental psuedepigraphal literature, comments on the substantial influence of 1 Enoch on Jewish religious life and the theological perspective of the early Church:

Some of these books, especially 1 Enoch, were highly regarded in both Jewish and Christian circles. Some Christians even favoured its inclusion in the canon of Scripture, but the criteria for accepting books as canonical rightly excluded psuedepigraphal works. Craig Evans wrote: ‘The materials in 1 Enoch range in date from 200 B.C.E. to 50 C.E. 1 Enoch contributes much to intertestamental views of angels, heaven, judgment, resurrection, and the Messiah. This book has left its stamp upon many of the New Testament writers, especially the author of Revelation.’¹⁶²

Some of the key texts which are used to defend the doctrine of endless punishment are found in the book of Revelation which will be examined later, but there is evidence of the influence of 1 Enoch when assessing the possible source, context and meaning of the Revelation terror texts. Gerhard Kittel sees 1 Enoch as foundational to the development of the idea of the post-mortem separation of the righteous and the wicked:

Under the influence of Persian and Hellenistic ideas concerning retribution after death the belief arose that the righteous and the godless would have very different fates, and we thus have the development of the idea of spatial separation in the underworld, the first instance being found in Enoch. According to Josephus the Pharisees held this view.¹⁶³

The significance of the literature of intertestamental times seems to be considerable and it is therefore important to evaluate how much weight should be placed upon these writings when searching for support for the doctrine of endless punishment. Fudge quotes some authors for whom these writings are very

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 112.

¹⁶² Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 73-74.

¹⁶³ Gerhard Kittel, ed, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 147.

significant if not crucial in the development of their view that the New Testament teaches the endless punishment of the wicked. For example A. Bisset speaks of the book of 1 Enoch as 'the great storehouse of teaching on final punishment' and C. T. Fritsch goes so far as to say that "most of the ideas regarding the future life which are found in the New Testament writings had their origin in the apocalyptic writings."¹⁶⁴ In response to this Fudge says 'Overstatements such as this have not gone unnoticed, as numerous scholars have pointed out.'¹⁶⁵ However he does understand the importance of this material, especially to the traditional view of endless punishment but agrees with Gregg that the intertestamental writings are far from uniform in their theological approach to this subject:

Most authors who have written in defense of unending conscious torment have presupposed that Jesus held that same view. Traditionalists commonly say that the Old Testament is largely silent concerning the end of the wicked. During the time between the Testaments, they allege, the doctrine of unending conscious torment developed from Old Testament principles. By the time Jesus was born, they continue, the idea of unending conscious torment had become "the Jewish view." From these premises, traditionalists concluded that Jesus himself also believed in everlasting conscious torment, and that we ought to interpret his teachings with that presupposition in mind.¹⁶⁶

Many scholars today would argue against the idea that there ever was a monolithic Jewish view in the Second Temple period. Amongst others, the known Jewish groups as recorded by Josephus included Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and Essenes. They all testify to a rich diversity of theological and political perspective in this era, although they did have circumcision, dietary food laws and Sabbath keeping in common which were the traditional badges of Jewish life and faith. In the Evangelical Alliance report, *The Nature of Hell*, it is recognised that the

¹⁶⁴ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 99.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 85.

intertestamental writings offer informative religious and linguistic background material to the New Testament, but comments on two significant difficulties, pertinent to this study:

First, intertestamental texts display a considerable variety of views, particularly with respect to life after death. This is reflected in the opposite position taken by Sadducees and Pharisees on the resurrection (Acts 23:8). Secondly, these texts are often hard to date. Some material previously thought to be pre-Christian, and therefore a possible influence on Christian ideas, is now thought to be later and itself influenced by Christian writers.¹⁶⁷

Fudge quotes Professor Richard Bauckham, an authority on intertestamental apocalyptic literature, as warning against relying on this period too heavily when interpreting New Testament writings on this subject:

Professor Richard Bauckham... issues this word of caution: "What we have still to take full account of is the fact that most of the concerns of Jewish apocalyptic in NT times do not appear in the NT writings. Heavily influenced by apocalyptic as primitive Christianity undoubtedly was, it was also highly selective in the aspects of apocalyptic which it took over. This is a fact about the NT which can only be appreciated by diligent study of pseudepigraphal works which do not look at all relevant to the New Testament."¹⁶⁸

Informative and interesting as the intertestamental literature may be, it should not be overly influential in an exegetical exploration of the New Testament with regard to seeking support for the traditional doctrine of Hell. The virtual silence of the Old Testament and the diversity of perspective within the intertestamental writings does not support the traditional view that the doctrine of Hell is evident throughout the bible. Whilst recognizing that the idea of the separation of the righteous and the wicked after death may be very briefly alluded to in the Old Testament and more explicitly stated in books such as Judith and 1 Enoch, it can be justifiably claimed that there is no developed, uniform idea of the endless punishment of the

¹⁶⁷ Hilborn, *The Nature of Hell*, 40-41.

¹⁶⁸ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 100.

wicked amongst these writings. It is then to an examination of the New Testament that support for this doctrine must be sought.

The New Testament is not a simple doctrinal handbook which can be consulted to verify an unarguable case for the doctrine of endless punishment. There are various theological strands to consider as well as semantic challenges when considering this issue in the New Testament. Wilko Van Holten argues that 'the biblical imagery pulls in different directions'¹⁶⁹ and makes the claim that 'an appeal to Scripture alone cannot settle the issue.'¹⁷⁰ He goes on to outline some of the New Testament texts used by proponents of various views:

It is generally acknowledged among biblical scholars that there is considerable discontinuity between the two testaments on this point. Or are we to base our view on the New Testament alone—perhaps merely on the recorded teachings of Jesus within the New Testament? It is very doubtful whether such a view can be developed, since the biblical imagery pulls in different directions pertaining to the condition of the damned. Should we follow texts like Matthew 8:12, 22:13, and 25:30 and consequently conceive of hell as a place of outer darkness? Or should we follow other texts (for example, Matthew 5:22, Jude 7, Revelation 14:10, 14:11, and 20:10) and conceive of hell in opposite terms, such as eternal fire, smoke, and brimstone? Is it perhaps more biblical to interpret hell as the ultimate destruction of the wicked (see, for example, Matthew 3:10, 3:12, 26:24, Philippians 1:28, 1 Thessalonians 1:9)? Still other texts (for example, Acts 3:21, Romans 11:25-32, 2 Corinthians 15:24-28, Ephesians 1:10, Philippians 2:10, 1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9) may be appealed to in order to defend universal salvation. Despite the seriousness of the individual authors who defend any of these positions, reviewing the literature as a whole, one is easily struck by some measure of arbitrariness in the use of Scripture and exegesis of particular texts displayed in purportedly "biblical" accounts of hell. In fact, I think that debates among evangelicals over the doctrine of hell over the last ten to fifteen years or so have made it abundantly clear that an appeal to Scripture alone cannot settle the issue. In light of this, an additional, partly philosophical evaluation of the issue becomes all the more appropriate.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Wilko Van Holten, 'Can the Traditional View of Hell be Defended? An Evaluation of Some Arguments for Eternal Punishment,' *Anglican Theological Review*, Volume 85 number 3. 2003.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

If, as Holten suggests, an appeal to Scripture alone will not settle the veracity of the doctrine of endless punishment, then an appeal to Church tradition, reason and experience can enhance an evaluation of the various views. However, there is merit in a careful examination of the relevant passages and texts, which together can help to establish how strong the case for the doctrine of endless punishment actually is. Crucial to this is the meaning of the Greek words *aiōn* and *aiōnios* which most English New Testaments continue to translate with words such as eternal, forever and everlasting. There is also the question of the meaning of the words *Gehenna*, *Hadēs* and *Tartarus* which have nearly always been translated as Hell in English translations of the New Testament. There are also some parables which are used by those advocating the doctrine of endless punishment, which will be examined. The two key stories are the parable of the goats and the sheep found in Matthew chapter 25 and the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, found in Luke chapter 16.

One of the areas of great disagreement surrounding this doctrine is the dispute with regard to the meaning of the Greek noun *Aiōn* and the adjective *Aiōnios*. The way these words have been translated into English has had a significant impact on the development of the doctrine of endless punishment in the English speaking world. The early usage of *Aiōn* and *Aiōnios* may challenge the relevance and fundamental meaning of some of the key passages that are utilized in arguments critiquing the doctrine of endless punishment and so must be examined with considerable care. Hermann Sasse in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* has an extensive and very detailed entry for these words, including references to their non-biblical use. In the non-biblical use of *Aiōn*, Sasse has 'vital

force' and 'life', in Homer, 'lifetime' in Hesiodus, 'Age' or 'generation' in Aeschylus, 'space of time' or 'time' with reference to the past and future in Demosthenes, and since Plato, 'eternity'.¹⁷² For *Aiōnios* he cites Orphica and Plato as using the word to mean 'eternal', and in later poetry and prose to mean 'lifelong and 'enduring' in accordance with the basic meaning of *Aiōn*.¹⁷³ Sasse goes on to say:

From the days of Heraclitus... and Empedocles the philosophers made use of the term in discussion of the problem of time. The high water mark of such discussions is found in Plato's *Timaeus*. Whereas Greek in general distinguishes between χρόνος and αἰών, using the former for time in itself and the latter for the relative time allotted to a being, Plato distinguishes between αἰών as timeless, ideal eternity, in which there are no days or months or years, and χρόνος as the time which is created with the world as a moving image of eternity...this view...is rather singular in the Greek world...Aristotle returns to the conception of αἰών as the relative period of time allotted to each specific thing.¹⁷⁴

It is evident from Sasse that in the ancient Greek world, there was not a uniform, simple meaning of *Aiōn* by the time of the first century. In his examination of biblical usage, the case is no less complex. He discusses *Aiōn* in the sense of prolonged time or eternity and states:

The idea of prolonged but not unending time is also present in the αἰών formulae. Noteworthy in this respect is the parallel in Colossians 1:26. The concepts of limited and unlimited time merge in the word αἰών. The implied inner contradiction is brought to light in the expression γενεά/αἰώνιος which is used as an equivalent of the plural in Romans 16:25, 2 Timothy 1:9, Titus 1:2; for eternal times is strictly a contradiction in terms.¹⁷⁵

The *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* has for its entry on time:

The O.T. and the N.T. are not acquainted with the conception of eternity as timelessness. The O.T. has not developed a special term for "eternity." The word *aiōn* originally meant "vital force", "life" then "age" or "lifetime." It is, however, also used generally of a (limited or unlimited) long space of time. The use of the word *aiōn* is

¹⁷² Sasse, Herman. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel 'Aiōnios' Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964. 197.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 208.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 197-198.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 199.

determined very much by the O.T. and the LXX, *aiōn* means "long distant uninterrupted time" in the past (Luke 1:10), as well as in the future (John 4:14).¹⁷⁶

This entry indicates that translating the Hebrew word *Olam*, via the Septuagint *aiōn* or *aiōnios* into the English word 'eternal', understood by many in common usage to mean 'everlasting' or 'endless', is in error. James Strong in his concordance gives three definitions of *aiōn* (*αἰών* Strong's number G165) '1. for ever, an unbroken age, perpetuity of time, eternity. 2. the worlds, universe 3. period of time, age.'¹⁷⁷

Strong's definition seems somewhat contradictory in that his first definition seems quite different from his second and an antonym of his third. This does underscore the complexity of this issue, and of course there must be allowance for different usage according to context, however a study such as this must be aware of interpretive bias and thus a wide range of scholarship must be engaged. In W.E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament words* he has the definition of *aiōn* as 'age, era (to be connected with *aei*, "ever," rather than with *ao*, "to breathe"), signifies a period of indefinite duration, or time viewed in relation to what takes place in the period. The force attaching to the word is not so much that of the actual length of a period, but that of a period marked by spiritual or moral characteristics.'¹⁷⁸ In his *Word Studies of the New Testament*, Professor Marvin Vincent states that:

The adjective *aiōnios* in like manner carries the idea of time. Neither the noun nor the adjective in themselves carries the sense of "endless" nor in 150 instances in the LXX (Septuagint), four-fifths imply limited duration... 2 Tim. 1:9 "Before the world began" (*pro chronon aiōnion*) literally, before eternal times. If it is insisted

¹⁷⁶ Keith Crim and George Buttrick, eds., *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible Volume IV* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 643.

¹⁷⁷ Strong's Concordance, accessed November 19, 2014, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G165&t=KJV>

¹⁷⁸ W.E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London: Oliphants, 1952), 41.

that *aiōnion* means everlasting, this statement is absurd. It is impossible that anything should take place before everlasting times.¹⁷⁹

In *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* Moulton and Milligan in their entry for

aiōnios, say 'In general, the word depicts that of which the horizon is not in view'.¹⁸⁰

Finally in James Hastings, *Hastings' Dictionary of the New Testament* in the entry for eternity, it says:

There is no word either in the O.T. Hebrew or in the N.T. Greek to express the abstract idea of eternity. Eternal, everlasting-nonetheless "eternal" is misleading, inasmuch as it has come in the English to connote the idea of "endlessly existing," and thus to be practically a synonym for "everlasting." But this is not an adequate rendering of *aiōnios* which varies in meaning with the variations of the noun *aiōn* from which it comes.¹⁸¹

For the purposes of this research it is crucial to ascertain as clearly as possible what the words *aiōn* and *aiōnios* actually mean, especially as it seems very probable from the above widely trusted and long established sources, that they do not simply and in every case mean eternity, eternal, everlasting or endless as the vast majority of English Bibles have translated them in the crucial texts for this study. It is clear from the above sources that have been examined that *aiōn* is indeed the Greek noun for 'age' or 'eon'. If, as many scholars suggest, *aiōn* means 'age' then the adjective *aiōnios* should relate to the noun and mean pertaining to an age. However, in some dictionaries and concordances such as Strong's number G166 he defines *aiōnios* as '1. without beginning and end, that which always has been and always will be 2. without beginning 3. without end, never to cease, everlasting'¹⁸² This seems to be a clear

¹⁷⁹ Marvin Vincent, *Word studies in the New Testament*, accessed December 10, 2014, <http://www.auburn.edu/~allenkc/vincent.html>

¹⁸⁰ James Moulton and George Milligan, *The Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1914), 16.

¹⁸¹ James Hastings ed., *Dictionary of the New Testament*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 542.

¹⁸² Strong's Concordance, accessed December 14, 2014, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G166&t=KJV>

case of interpreter's bias, as is evidenced by some verses where these definitions cannot possibly fit such as Romans 16:25 'Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages.' This translation makes sense of *chronos aiōn ios*, whereas if Strong's definitions were utilised, the verse would indicate that the mystery would have been kept secret forever, without beginning or end. If endless is the consistent meaning of *aiōnios* then undoubtedly the traditionalist case is considerably strengthened and Salvationist belief in the endless punishment of the wicked is well founded. It is far from certain considering the above evidence that these words always mean or imply endlessness. The traditionalist case rests heavily on demonstrating irrefutably that *aiōnios*, in the relevant texts, means endless. Other perspectives that critique the traditional view only need to demonstrate that this is not necessarily the case. Fudge quotes several traditionalist authors who insist that *aiōn* and *aiōnios* are quantitative words meaning endless time and then argues carefully that it is sometimes used in Scripture for things that do not last forever and therefore can be a character word, as Vines dictionary indicates, as well as a duration word depending on the context.

Scripture frequently uses *aiōn*, *aiōnios* and their Hebrew counterparts (*olam* in various forms) of things that have come to an end. The sprinkling of blood at the Passover was an "everlasting" ordinance (Exodus 12:24). So were the Aaronic priesthood (Exodus 29:9; 40:15; Lev 3:17), Caleb's inheritance (Joshua 14:9), Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 8:12–13), the period of a slave's life (Deuteronomy 15:17), Gehazi's leprosy (2 Kings 5:27) and practically every other ordinance, rite, or institution of the Old Testament system. These things did not last "forever" in the sense of "time extended without limitation." They did last beyond the vision of those who first heard them called "everlasting," and no time limit was then set at all.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 35.

Another piece of evidence that indicates that *Aiōnios* does not mean 'endless' comes from the sixth century. The Emperor Justinian who ruled the Eastern Roman Empire, sheds light on the meaning of *Aiōnios* in a very interesting extant letter he wrote to the Patriarch Mennas. He was deeply engaged in ecclesiological matters and took an intense interest in theological debates. Talbott quotes Joseph Cullen Ayer on this matter: "According to Justinian's scheme of Church government, the Emperor was the head of the Church in the sense that he had the right and duty of regulating by his laws the minutest detail of worship and discipline, and also of dictating the theological opinions to be held in the Church."¹⁸⁴ This engagement in the life of the Church by Justinian inevitably led to his involvement in the debate with regard to the post-mortem fate of the wicked:

In 543 the Emperor Justinian (527–565 AD) anathematized the doctrine of deliverance from hell, and in 553 the Fifth Ecumenical Council in Constantinople issued a series of fifteen condemnations against the teachings of some extreme Origenist monks in Palestine. Their version of the doctrine of *apokatastasis* condemned by the council was a far more radical (and questionable) version than anything found in Origen or Gregory.¹⁸⁵

In his extensive and detailed article on this subject, Alexander Thompson outlines the use by Justinian, of the word *ateleuteetos* a word meaning 'endless' which is not found in the Bible, but which, by its use indicates that *Aiōnios* does not mean the same:

He was determined that certain doctrines must be suppressed. In setting forth the position when writing to the Patriarch Mennas of Constantinople, he discussed the doctrines with great ability. In particular, he wished it made very plain that the life of the saints was to be everlasting, and that the doom of the lost was to be likewise. Yet he did not argue that the word eonian meant everlasting. Nor did he claim that the word eonian had hitherto been misunderstood. In setting forth the orthodox position of the Church of that time, he did not say, "We believe in eonian punishment," as this was exactly what Origen, three hundred years before, had maintained and believed. In fact, Origen, who exulted in the truth of the

¹⁸⁴ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 18.

¹⁸⁵ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 174.

reconciliation of the universe, definitely used the word eonian with reference to fire and doom as meaning a limited time. But writing in the very expressive Greek language, Justinian says, "The holy church of Christ teaches an endless eonian (*ateleuteetos* αἰώνιος) life for the just, and endless (*ateleuteetos*) punishment for the wicked." Justinian knew quite well that by itself eonian did not signify endless, and he therefore added a word the meaning of which is quite unequivocal, a word not found in the Scriptures. This letter of Justinian, which is still in existence, ought to convince anyone who is in doubt, regarding the true scriptural meaning of the word eonian. It may be added, that the Council, though expressly convened in order to stigmatize the teachings of Origen, one of which was that punishment was only temporary, condemned his views generally, but did not anathematize his teaching regarding the reconciliation of all.¹⁸⁶

Here then is clear evidence from the pen of Emperor Justinian that *Aiōnios* did not mean 'endless', at least in that era. Unless a study of Church history had been undertaken it would be imagined by many that the various councils which met to determine Christian orthodoxy, would be motivated by a sincere attempt to discern the truth of Scripture. However, it seems that sometimes the motivation was not to engage in honest, authentic theological reflection, but to gain or maintain political power, as Talbott outlines:

So it went with Justinian the great. It is hardly surprising that a church under the control of such an emperor, who is famous for his *anathemata* and his persecutions, should have rejected the doctrine of universal reconciliation. For insofar as fear of eternal damnation and the power of excommunication, backed by the coercive power of the state, had become the emperor's primary means of social control, he could hardly tolerate a doctrine that would seem to undermine that power all together. Justinian thus illustrates an important historical truth. Many religious doctrines serve, among other things, a sociological function and over the centuries the traditional understanding of hell has served one function especially well. It has enabled religious and political leaders to cultivate fear as a means of social control. That more than anything else explains why the imperial church came to regard the idea of universal reconciliation as a threat not only to social stability but to its own power and authority as well¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Alexander Thompson, 'Whence Eternity?' accessed December 3, 2014, <http://alexanderthomson.blogspot.co.uk/2009/06/whence-eternity.html>.

¹⁸⁷ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 19-20.

The idea that a doctrine such as universal reconciliation could be suppressed and even anathematized for political and sociological reasons is shocking, but Talbott, Thompson and others offer good evidence that this is exactly what happened. The evidence concerning the meaning of *Aiōnios* from the letter to Mennas from Justinian, whose motivation seemed to be to anathematize the doctrine of universal reconciliation, is even more compelling in the light of his motivation. This persuasive evidence completes the argument of this study with regard to the case that *Aiōnios* does not simply mean everlasting or endless. *Aiōnios* is the adjective which describes the eternal God rather than the word of endless time as Talbott, quoting William Barclay points out.

I think it fair to say that on no occasion of its use in the New Testament does *aiōnios* carry any implication of unending temporal duration. On three occasions (see Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 1:2), this term does combine with the concept of time in such a way as to imply temporal duration; but on each of these occasions, which are clearly exceptional, the context excludes the idea of unending temporal duration. Given its more normal usage in the New Testament, where *aiōnios* refers either to God himself or to the possessions, gifts, or actions of God, it appears to have a special religious meaning that has nothing to do with the duration of temporal events. According to Barclay: "The essence of the word *aiōnios* is that it is the word of the eternal order as contrasted with the order of this world; it is the word of deity as contrasted with humanity; essentially it is the word which can be properly applied to no one other than God. *Aiōnios* is the word that describes nothing less and nothing other than the life of God."¹⁸⁸

The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine published in 1998 supports the idea that *aiōnios* does not always mean endlessness when it states 'The life beyond death which beckons the Christian is eternal life. This is a quality of life in the presence of God, not simply everlasting time.'¹⁸⁹ This understanding of the meaning of *aiōnios* should lay to rest the understandable concerns of traditionalists, such as the founders of The Salvation Army, who have always argued that if punishment is not

¹⁸⁸ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 82-83.

¹⁸⁹ The Salvation Army, *Salvation Story*, 117.

endless, then 'eternal' life is not endless either. Punishment that reflects the quality of life in the presence of God, is a very different matter to punishment which consists of pointless, punitive endless torment. This and other issues will be addressed further in the following investigation of the parable of the sheep and the goats found in Matthew 25.

It was a surprise to discover that William Booth only quoted one verse, Matthew 5:46 'And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life' in his exposition explaining and defending the stance taken on Hell in the first Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine. The use of this one verse may be explained by the fact that in this parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46 is found the only verse where the words 'eternal' and 'punishment' (*aiōnios kolasis*) are used together in the New Testament.

In this story told by Jesus, the righteous receive their inheritance of life in the kingdom because they are the ones who have showed hospitality, clothed the naked, cared for the sick, visited those in prison and fed the hungry. The wicked are dismissed from the presence of the King with the words 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.' (Matthew 25:41) because they are the ones who completely failed to engage with the most vulnerable members of society, those whom the King identified with so profoundly that he could say 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' Matthew 25:45. This shocking statement from Jesus could well indicate that this parable is not so much theological teaching with regard to the post-mortem separation of the wicked and righteous, but about how we

should care for and value the poorest and most vulnerable in society. It would be imagined that The Salvation Army would readily identify with this reading of the parable in the light of its deliberate engagement in practical ministry amongst the poorest of the poor in Victorian society. It is interesting then, that Booth placed so much weight on the last verse of this parable in defence of his doctrinal stance on Hell, whilst ignoring the main thrust of the teaching of this parable which seems to identify completely with the activism of his new movement. A possible explanation as to why Booth ignored the obvious reading is that this teaching of Jesus could be read as supporting salvation by works, an anathema to Protestants. It is also completely counter to Salvation Army doctrine eight which states that ‘We believe that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ...’¹⁹⁰ It would seem that endless punishment was such an ingrained dogma of nineteenth century evangelical tradition that this parable could be used by William Booth as a compelling justification for his theology of the nature and duration of life after death for the unsaved, whilst not wanting to emphasize its obvious meaning which is the vital necessity of pursuing justice for the marginalized in the here and now. It seems that many traditionalists have failed to understand that this parable actually concerns how we should treat each other in our *pre-mortem* state, rather than a didactic passage with regard to our post-mortem destiny. Andrew Perriman interestingly sees this parable as a judgment on the nations rather than a judgement of the dead:

What Matthew 25:31-46 describes is a symbolic judgment of the nations, at a time when the Son of Man will be publicly vindicated, on the basis of how they reacted to the presence of Jesus’ disciples (“the least of these my brothers”) in their midst. It is not a judgment of the dead, that is simply an assumption that we have typically read

¹⁹⁰ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, xv.

into the passage. Both “life” and “punishment”, therefore, must be interpreted in socio-political terms, with reference to the continuing existence of the nations following the vindication of the Son of Man and of the early martyr church.¹⁹¹

However plausible this account may be, there can be no doubt that Matthew 25:46 is still a key verse in the debate with regard to the veracity of the doctrine of endless punishment and centres on one of the pivotal issues in the argument amongst scholars, which is the meaning of the adjective *Aiōnios*, which has been discussed above. In the particular context of Matthew 25:46, Fudge quotes R.T. France who argues that ‘eternal’ cannot be taken as a synonym for ‘everlasting’:

In the New International Commentary on the New Testament, R. T. France, former Warden of Tyndale House (Cambridge), Principal of Wycliffe Hall (Oxford), and Senior Lecturer and Vice-Principal of London Bible College, weighs the significance of Matt 25:46 for the debate about hell. “In the debate among evangelical theologians on the issue of annihilation against continuing punishment,” France begins, “the phrase ‘eternal punishment’ here in Matt 25:46 is commonly cited as a proof-text for the latter position.” Traditionalists base this conclusion, first of all, on their interpretation of the adjective “eternal.” France calls that interpretation into question. The traditionalist conclusion “is usually on the assumption that ‘eternal’ is a synonym for ‘everlasting,’” France writes, but that is an assumption he does not find warranted. “That assumption depends more on modern English usage than on the meaning of *aiōnios*, which we have seen to be related to the concept of the two ages. ‘Eternal punishment,’ so understood, is punishment which relates to the age to come rather than punishment which continues forever, so that the term does not in itself favour one side or the other in the annihilationist debate.”¹⁹²

The use of *aiōnios* to mean ‘the age to come’ in this context certainly changes the understanding of the word as rendered by most English translations. One of the few English versions of the New Testament that understands this is Young’s literal translation which renders this phrase as ‘and these shall go away to punishment age-during, but the righteous to life age-during.’ This translation, evidently supported by theologians such as R.T. France, impacts the debate considerably in

¹⁹¹ Andrew Perriman, *Hell and Heaven in Narrative Perspective* (www.postost.net: Andrew Perriman, 2012), Kindle edition, location 265.

¹⁹² Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 140-141.

that it raises the possibility that punishment in the age to come may not simply be a matter of endless duration. Also, significant for an understanding of this text is the nature of the word used for punishment which is *kolasis*. This word is nearly always rendered as ‘punishment’ in English translations, and along with *aiōnios*, is the subject of considerable discussion and debate as to its meaning in the context of Matthew 25:46. The crux of the argument concerns whether this word refers to endless conscious torment, extinction or a punishment designed to restore. The Greek word used here for punishment (*kolasis*) which Strong’s concordance has as ‘correction’ has at its root the idea of pruning. If annihilation were indicated in this verse the much stronger word *timōria* which Strong’s has as vengeance could have been used, as William Barclay in *Apostles’ Creed* points out:

The word for punishment is *kolasis*. The word was originally a gardening word, and its original meaning was *pruning trees*. In Greek there are two words for punishment, *timoria* and *kolasis*, and there is a quite definite distinction between them. Aristotle defines the difference; *kolasis* is for the sake of the one who suffers it; *timoria* is for the sake of the one who inflicts it. Plato says that no one punishes (*kolazei*) simply because he has done wrong - that would be to take unreasonable vengeance (*timoreitai*). We punish (*kolazei*) a wrong-doer in order that he may not do wrong again (*Protagoras* 323 E). Clement of Alexandria (*Stromateis* 4.24; 7.16) defines *kolasis* as pure *discipline*, and *timoria* as the return of evil for evil. Aulus Gellius says that *kolasis* is given that a man may be corrected; *timoria* is given that dignity and authority may be vindicated (*The Attic Nights* 7.14). The difference is quite clear in Greek and it is always observed. *Timoria* is retributive punishment. *Kolasis* is always given to amend and to cure.¹⁹³

The traditional view is considerably weakened if *aiōnios* is a word of quality of life rather than a word simply meaning endless life, as R.T. France and many other theologians claim. It is also weakened if the nature of the punishment which the

¹⁹³ William Barclay, *The Apostles’ Creed* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 189.

word *kolasis* indicates allows for the possibility that the punishment could be restorative rather than retributive, as Barclay claims.

The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom belongs to the Evangelical Alliance which is the oldest and largest organisation representing evangelicals in the United Kingdom. The report called *The Nature of Hell* published by the Evangelical Alliance in the year 2000 was of interest to all the member denominations concerned with this issue. The report findings, which holds out the possibility that views other than the traditional doctrine of hell may be equally valid for evangelicals, are certainly pertinent to this study. This is especially so as The Salvation Army sees itself very much as part of the evangelical family of denominations in this country. The report outlines briefly the debate between the different perspectives surrounding

Matthew 25:46:

Probably the most commonly cited text in defence of the traditional position is Matthew 25:46. Here, Jesus appears to draw a straight parallel between 'eternal life' and 'eternal punishment', applying the same adjective (*aiōn ios*) to both states. Since it is clear that Jesus offers genuinely everlasting, unending life to those who follow him, surely the logic goes, he must be warning of a retribution which will be correspondingly everlasting and unending for those who refuse him. The standard conditionalist reply to such exegesis suggests that our preconceptions force us to read the text in this manner, whereas the passage never in fact defines the 'eternal' states to which it refers. Certainly, conditionalists accept that it equates redeemed 'life' as everlasting with divine 'punishment' as everlasting, but they characteristically point out that this punishment could be the punishment of destruction, a punishment which is no less real than ongoing torture, but which would be eternal in overall effect rather than in the personal consciousness of every condemned sinner. Stephen Travis echoes the often asserted conditionalist point that a better translation of Matthew 25:46 would be less precisely chronological, that is, 'the punishment of the age to come' and 'the life of the age to come' for Travis, Powys and other conditionalists, this rendering conveys the fact that *aiōnios* should be understood in the wider context of biblical eschatology, as an adjective of quality rather than quantity, one that defines a new order of being which cannot finally be measured in terms of time.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹⁴ Hilborn, *The Nature of Hell*, 79-80.

This recognition of the validity of the conditionalist case by the Evangelical Alliance will be seen as a courageous and welcome change for some, a shaking of the foundations for the more entrenched members of the Alliance and for those evangelicals leaning towards universalism, the report will be seen as not going far enough. However, many would agree with the conditionalist emphasis in the report that *aiōnios* in this context is an adjective of quality and relates to the nature of the punishment and to the quality of life in the age to come, rather than simply its duration. Where a restorationist would disagree with the conditionalist position is that they would question whether punishment in the age to come can only mean annihilation. Talbott makes an interesting case for the restorationist perspective:

In the New Testament *aiōnios* applies paradigmatically... to God himself (see the reference to “the eternal God” in Rom 16:26) and signifies that which distinguishes the incorruptible God from the sources of change, corruption, and contingency in the created order. Other things, for example, the gifts, possessions, and actions of God, are eternal in the secondary sense that they have their causal source in the eternal God himself...Accordingly eternal punishment is simply punishment of any duration that has its causal source in the eternal purposes of God...We see this clearly in Jude where the author described the fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah as ‘eternal fire’...the point here was not that the fire literally burned forever without consuming these cities and continues to burn today. The point was that the fire is a form of divine judgment upon these cities, a foreshadowing of eschatological judgment, and that its causal source lies in the eternal God himself. And similarly, for the eternal fire and the eternal punishment to which Jesus alluded in Matthew 25:41 and 46 respectively: like the fire that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah, this fire will not be eternal in the sense that it will burn forever without consuming anything, without consuming for example, that which is false within a person, and neither will it be eternal in the sense that it continues forever without accomplishing its corrective purpose. Both the fire and the punishment are eternal in the twofold sense that their causal source lies in the eternal God himself and that their corrective effects will literally endure forever. For anything that the eternal God does (or any specific action of his in the created order) is eternal in the sense that it is the eternal God who does it. So, the parallelism in Matthew 25:46 is just this: even as eternal punishment is a form of punishment that has its causal source in the eternal God and thus manifests his presence in a special way, so “eternal life” is a mode of living that has its causal source in the eternal God and again manifests his presence in a special way. In the Gospel of John, we thus read, ‘And this is eternal

life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' (17:3). The emphasis here is clearly upon the special *quality*, not the duration of a life in proper relationship with God.¹⁹⁵

It can be seen from this discussion that the traditionalist perspective, that punishment in the parable of the sheep and the goats is endless conscious torment, is challenged both by the conditionalist and the restorationist analysis. Whilst the conditionalist reading, that the eternal punishment will be annihilation and only endless in its effect, is an interesting alternative to the traditional view, it can be argued that it is not the only alternative reading of this text. If the root of the word *kolasis* is pruning rather than complete destruction, then punishment in the age to come could be understood to be restorative.

The possibility that eternal punishment will not be endless and retributive but will be for the purpose of restoration is strengthened by Jan Bonda in his examination of another parable. In *The One Purpose of God* Bonda points to the story of the faithful and unfaithful slaves in Luke 12 and states:

Jesus refers to a differentiation in judgement. The slave who knew what his master wanted, but did not do accordingly, will receive "many stripes." But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating, will receive "few stripes." (Luke 12:47-48, AV). "Few stripes" surely have an end, and the same applies even to "many stripes." The text does not speak of an endless beating. Thus, Jesus here refers to a punishment that has an end. This also implies that the punishment has a *purpose*; when that purpose has been reached, sooner or later the punishment ceases.¹⁹⁶

So, from the restorationist perspective the goats in the parable found in Matthew 25 will, in the age to come, be assigned for punishment which is designed by the eternal God to restore them to life. The restorationist case would suggest that this

¹⁹⁵ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 83-85.

¹⁹⁶ Jan Bonda, *The One Purpose of God: An Answer to the Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 70.

interpretation fits in with the overall metanarrative of Scripture that reveals that we have a God who is love (1 John 4:8) a God who commands us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44) and so will do no less himself. The sovereignty of God must indicate that the creator must have a choice as to whether punishment in the age to come will be retributive or restorative or even both and His sovereign will is that all should be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). It is clear from the above examination of the parable of the goats and the sheep and especially Matthew 25:46 that the traditional reading is far from irrefutable, and relies heavily on the word *aiōnios* being used in the sense of endlessness. The conditionalist case also seems weak in that it is impossible to reason why the eternal God who is love and is sovereign would choose to annihilate his creation, rather than heal them. I would argue then that the restorationist reading of this parable is the one that resonates best with the overall tenor of Scripture and at the same time offers the most reasonable exegesis of this story, as Talbott suggests:

The universalist perspective rests upon two crucial theological assumptions for which we find ample support in the New Testament: first, that God, being perfectly loving, wills or sincerely desires the redemption of all sinners, and second, that God, being almighty, will in fact satisfy his own will desire in this matter. If you accept both of these assumptions, then universalism follows as a deductive consequence. So, if you reject universalism, then you must also reject at least one of these assumptions; that is, you must either deny that God wills (or sincerely desires) the redemption of all sinners or deny that he will in fact satisfy his own will or desire in this matter. The Augustinians deny the first assumption, and the Arminians deny the second. St. Paul, I have argued, endorses both assumptions; and in some of his most systematic theological discourses, such as Romans 5 and 11 and 1 Corinthians 15, he explicitly endorses the idea of universal reconciliation as well.¹⁹⁷

The resolve to read the endless punishment of the wicked into this parable by traditionalists, despite excellent alternative hermeneutical approaches, seems to be

¹⁹⁷ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 103.

motivated by a laudable determination to uphold the hope of eternal life for the righteous. In the restorationist interpretation of Matthew 25:46, the wicked, through remedial punishment, will eventually enjoy the full life that Jesus came to give (John 10:10), a life which the righteous, who have already been restored in their earthly life, will continue to enjoy when they die. This interpretation negates the traditional argument that if punishment is not endless for the wicked then life is not endless for the righteous. In this restorationist reading of the text, the adjective *aiōnios* is a quality word rather than a word of endless time. There is very good evidence, some of which is cited above, that *aiōnios* has the sense of describing 'the age to come' which is the age of the reign of the eternal God of love and justice and relates to the reign of God rather than simply endless time. The arguments against the traditional view, that Matthew 25:46 teaches the endless punishment of the wicked, are biblical, theologically robust and philosophically reasonable. This should encourage The Salvation Army to question whether the enormous weight put on Matthew 25:46 in the first handbook of doctrine written by William Booth, was justified.

In addition to the parable of the sheep and the goats, the following story is very important to the traditional doctrine of Hell as it is one of the key texts which seems to suggest that Hell is a place of endless punishment:

There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. And at his gate lay a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, who longed to satisfy his hunger with what fell from the rich man's table; even the dogs would come and lick his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³ In *Hadēs*, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side. He called out, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am in agony in

these flames.” But Abraham said, “Child, remember that during your lifetime you received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in agony. Besides all this, between you and us a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who might want to pass from here to you cannot do so, and no one can cross from there to us.” He said, “Then, father, I beg you to send him to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may warn them, so that they will not also come into this place of torment.” Luke 16:19-28

As can be seen from verses 22 and 23, Lazarus is carried to Abraham by angels, whilst the rich man is being tormented in flames. In verse 26 Abraham tells the rich man that a great chasm is fixed between them, indicating that in *Hadēs* there will never ever be hope for the wicked. In his book *Heaven*, Randy Alcorn indicates that in this story, he believes Jesus is teaching the plain truth about the afterlife. ‘In his story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus taught that in Hell, the wicked suffer terribly, are fully conscious, retain their desires and memories and reasoning, long for relief, cannot be comforted, cannot leave their torment, and are bereft of hope.’¹⁹⁸ He concludes ‘The Saviour could not have painted a more bleak or graphic picture.’ However, Gregg presents a less literal view of the origins and meaning of this story and sees in it the influence of 1 Enoch on elements of Jewish eschatology that would have been current at the time of Jesus. There is a striking similarity between 1 Enoch and this story in the idea of different compartments for the righteous and wicked in *Hadēs*:

We read in The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia: “In the intertestamental period the idea of the afterlife underwent some development. In Jewish apocalyptic literature *Hadēs* was an intermediate place (1 Enoch 51:1) where all the souls of the dead awaited judgment (22:3f). The dead were separated into compartments, the righteous staying in an apparently pleasant place (v. 9) and various classes of sinners undergoing punishments in other compartments (vv. 10–13).” ...Anyone acquainted with mainstream evangelical notions of the state of the dead will recognize a great similarity, even identity, between these ideas introduced by Enoch into Judaism and those held by many modern Christians. It is not customary for evangelical Christians to look to intertestamental Jewish sources for their doctrine, and these ideas about

¹⁹⁸ Randy Alcorn, *Heaven* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2004), 25-26.

the state of the unsaved dead probably would never have made the transition into Christianity from the influence of pre-Christian Enoch alone. Given the frequent references by Jesus and Paul to the dead as “sleeping,” it is not likely that this concept of souls being tortured in the intermediate state would be accepted as a Christian idea at all, if not for Christ’s own use of this motif in His famous story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus.¹⁹⁹

This insight is invaluable in attempting to understand this story in the context of first century Jewish life. Gregg goes on to say, ‘Here, and only here, in the teaching of Jesus, do we find any description of the intermediate state of the dead. A great burden is therefore placed upon this one story, in evangelical discussions of Hell, to provide information concerning what Jesus thought about the afterlife.’²⁰⁰

However, it is clear that there are elements of this story which are not in line with the traditional Christian picture of Hell, as MacDonald points out. ‘Nowhere else does Jesus ever suggest that the coming judgment precedes the end of the age.’²⁰¹ He goes on to point out that the place of punishment in this parable is *Hadēs* and not *Gehenna*, which is argued by traditionalists as the place in the teachings of Jesus where the wicked are consigned to after the final judgment. MacDonald argues that these discrepancies in consistency have led some scholars including Richard Bauckham to suggest that this parable is an adaption by Jesus of a Near Eastern folk tale, used to critique the greed of the Pharisees and their assumption that their religious piety would ensure them a place in the ‘bosom of Abraham’. He goes on to quote the Evangelical Alliance report *The Nature of Hell* which agrees with this hypothesis:

¹⁹⁹ Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 74-75.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 145.

From a literary critical perspective, most now recognize that it is based on a well-established Near Eastern folk tale, of which several versions had been produced in Jewish Literature at the time, and in which the central concerns were avarice, stewardship and pride rather than the mechanics of heaven and hell.²⁰²

This analysis is also in line with the context of Luke 16, which accuses the Pharisees of being lovers of money (verse 14). In the light of the context and the similarities to the Near East folk tale, together with the discrepancies in this story compared with the other judgement passages in the gospels, it seems very likely that this story is not concerned to illuminate the destiny of humanity after the final judgement at the end of time, but a judgment on the shallow piety of the religious leaders of Israel at the time of Jesus, as Perriman agrees:

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus addresses the precarious condition of wealthy Jews facing eschatological judgment. In context, it does not speak to the whole of humanity, though it has a conventional moral core to it and can easily be recycled. Jesus asserts that it is the poor and marginalized in Israel who will be restored to the “bosom of Abraham”; the wealthy scribes and Pharisees, who have turned a deaf ear to the Law and the Prophets, will suffer the punishment of the Gehenna of fire. In the end, it is only a parable. It is no more an argument for hell than the parable of the treasure in the field is an argument for buying a metal detector.²⁰³

MacDonald quotes David Powys in his section on the rich man and Lazarus and it is clear that he is in general agreement with Perriman in his analysis of this parable:

The purpose of the story was not to affirm the reality of Gehenna, but rather to demonstrate the inadequacy of Pharisaic piety, and to do this by means of the system of concepts which gave that piety its rationale. “Gehenna,” “reward and punishment” and “the world to come” were paraded not to affirm them as true, but to lampoon them as incapable of promoting true faithfulness...If this interpretation of the rich man and Lazarus is accepted, it must be concluded that the story has no bearing on the question of the fate of the unrighteous... Its purpose was to call the Pharisees to repentance.²⁰⁴

²⁰² Ibid.,146.

²⁰³ Perriman, *Hell and Heaven in Narrative Perspective*, Kindle Edition, Location 303.

²⁰⁴ MacDonald, *The Evangelical Universalist*, 147.

There is convincing evidence that this is not a passage of Scripture in which Jesus describes the nature of the afterlife, as traditionalists might hope, but a powerful critique of the 'lovers of money' using a familiar story to make his point. Gregg quotes a source as saying that, in a doctoral dissertation from Amsterdam University, seven versions of this story have been discovered circulating in the first century in which the fates of a rich man and a poor man are reversed after death.²⁰⁵ He concludes:

There would be nothing objectionable in Jesus' taking something from Jewish folklore and teaching from it. A modern preacher might similarly employ ideas from *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, or other well-known religious fiction, without for a moment suggesting that he regarded any of those stories to be historically true or set in an environment resembling the real world.²⁰⁶

It is hoped that from an examination of these parables that it has been established that they do not strengthen or uphold the doctrine of endless punishment. In addition to this there are other parables such as the lost son, the lost sheep, and the lost coin in Luke chapter 15, which add weight to the restorationist perspective. The picture that the gospel of Luke portrays is that the nature of God is to seek the least and the lost until they are found.

Hell is a word widely used in the English language and has many cultural associations for all English speaking people. It is important therefore to examine the words used in the New Testament which have traditionally been translated as Hell in the English language. *Geenna* (Latin *Gehenna*), *Hadēs* and *Tartaros* (Latin *Tartarus*) are the three Greek words found in the New Testament that have been

²⁰⁵ Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 79.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

translated as Hell in various English Bibles throughout the years, although they are not synonymous. *Tartarus* is alluded to (in the verb form *tartaroō*) only once in Scripture, in 2 Peter 2:4 ‘God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into Hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgement’.²⁰⁷ Many commentators mention that *Tartarus* is the deepest chasm of *Hadēs* in Greek mythology. *Tartarus* was a place reserved for enemies of the gods, a place where the Titans, defeated by Zeus were consigned and is described as being as far below *Hadēs* as heaven is above the earth. Vines expository dictionary says ‘The verb *tartaroō* translated ‘cast down to Hell’ in 2 Peter 2:4 signifies to consign to *Tartarus*, which is neither *Sheol* nor *Hadēs* nor Hell, but the place where those angels whose special sin is referred to in that passage are confined.’²⁰⁸ For whatever reason the word is used in 2 Peter, it is clear that it bears little relationship to the commonly held traditional Christian view of Hell as the place of eternal punishment for unrepentant human beings, although even in many modern English translations of *tartaroō* the word Hell is still used.

Hadēs is another word from Greek mythology that has often been translated Hell in English translations of the Bible. Vine’s entry for *Hadēs* is enlightening in this matter:

Hadēs (ᾍδης), the region of departed spirits of the lost (but including the blessed dead in periods preceding the Ascension of Christ). It has been thought by some that the word etymologically meant the unseen, but the derivation is questionable; a more probable derivation is from *hado*, signifying all receiving. It corresponds to ‘Sheol’ in the Old Testament. In the authorized version of the Old Testament and New Testament it has been unhappily rendered ‘Hell’.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Vine, *Expository Dictionary*, 213.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

Perhaps it is that *Tartarus* and *Hadēs* were ‘unhappily rendered Hell’ because of theological bias amongst translators who were attempting to uphold Christian orthodoxy, rather than seeking to translate the words under consideration as accurately as possible. In Greek mythology *Hadēs* is the god of death and the dead and it is also used to mean the realm of the dead. *Hadēs* occurs eleven times in the New Testament and is always used in the Septuagint to translate the Hebrew word *Sheol* which has been discussed in the section on the Old Testament. The only reference that indicates a connection between *Hadēs* and eternal conscious torment is Luke 16:23 ‘In *Hadēs*, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side.’ This is found in the story of the rich man which has been discussed above. The four references to *Hadēs* in Revelation are all specifically linked with death, as in the final reference, Revelation 20:14 ‘Then Death and *Hadēs* were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire’. If, as some suggest, the lake of fire is synonymous with hell, it seems rather confusing that *Hadēs*, which is translated as Hell in many English Bibles, should itself be thrown into Hell. Gregory Beale is one such scholar who sees ‘the lake of fire’ as being the place of eternal conscious torment, and offers an explanation which suggests that this ‘second death’ is not actually physical death:

The “lake of fire” has already been defined as unending, conscious punishment for all consigned to it (see comments on 20:10; cf. 14:10-11). Now it is also termed “the second death.” This is not a second physical death. The unbelievers undergoing judgment have already died physically and been resurrected (20:5, 12-13). Revelation 20:10 shows that suffering the torment of the “lake of fire” does not involve physical death but suffering that is primarily spiritual in nature, since Satan and his angels are only spiritual beings. Corporeal suffering may be included for unbelieving humans, but only because they suffer spiritually while possessing resurrected bodies that never die physically...The reference to “fire and brimstone”

in 21:8 identifies the “second death” with the eternal, conscious torment by “fire and brimstone” in 14:10-11 and 20:10.²¹⁰

This reading of the text rests not only on a rather convoluted interpretation of the meaning of death in this context but also upon God gifting resurrected bodies to the wicked, simply in order that they can be tormented forever. Beal’s traditional perspective leads him to identify unending, conscious punishment with the lake of fire and therefore it results in a very strained explanation of how death and *Hadēs* can be thrown into the lake. Alternative readings of the passage regarding death and *Hadēs* being thrown into the lake of fire depend on a much more straightforward understanding of ‘death’ in this context:

“death and *Hadēs*” are “thrown into the lake of fire” (v. 14). More than 700 years before, Isaiah had foretold a time when God would “destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations,” when he “will swallow up death forever” (Isa 25:7–8). Paul had written: “The last enemy to be destroyed is death” (1 Corinthians 15:26) and had spoken of the time when the saying will come true that “death has been swallowed up in victory” (v. 54). This is the consummation of God’s victory over his final foe. Death and *Hadēs* are certainly abstractions, not persons, and the lake of fire here means their annihilation. Death will be no more, forever... There is no good reason for not taking John’s explanation exactly as it stands, or for importing foreign Platonic definitions of “death” as “separation” into the discussion here. The natural sense is to be preferred, and here it could hardly be made plainer than it is. The final options are “life” or “death.”²¹¹

Although this view does not depend upon the terrible prospect of God resurrecting bodies in order to torment them forever, it does suggest a rather shallow victory, concluding as it does in the annihilation of countless millions of people whom God had willed to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). Thomas Talbott coming from a restorationist perspective, offers what seems to be a much more coherent and hopeful interpretation of this verse:

Death and *Hadēs* are both cast into the lake of fire along with “anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life” (Rev 20:14–15). So how should we

²¹⁰ Gregory Beale, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Cambridge: William Eerdmans, 2015), 461.

²¹¹ Date, *Rethinking Hell*, Location 1109.

understand such an image, given that neither Death nor *Hadēs* is literally a person capable of being punished? In view of Paul's prediction in 1 Corinthians 15:26 that the "last enemy to be destroyed is death," ...Being cast into the lake of fire is therefore called "the second death" because it represents the death of death, that is, the place where Death itself is finally destroyed forever. But in Pauline theology, at least, death is more than a physical process; it is also a spiritual condition and includes everything that separates us from union with God. From the perspective of Pauline theology, therefore, the final destruction of death must also include a final destruction of everything that separates us from union with God. Isn't that the whole point of Paul's teaching...that the old person must be destroyed, and destroyed forever? Then, and only then, can the new creation in Christ fully emerge and receive a new name (Rev 2:17; 3:12), one that is written in the book of life.²¹²

In this reading, the destruction of death and *Hadēs* in 1 Corinthians 15:5 is in every sense a victory for God. It is interesting that in the King James translation this verse is rendered 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? This is the only time in the New Testament in which this version translates the word *Hadēs* as grave, in all the other occurrences of *Hadēs*, Hell is used. Perhaps it was that the translators did not want to indicate that Hell could possibly be synonymous with death as this verse implies. Alan Bernstein points this out in his discussion of 1 Corinthians 15:54-55:

He (Paul) never used the word 'Gehenna' and in the one place where he refers to *Hadēs* it is in the context of celebrating the resurrection of the flesh, the defeat of death...Here Paul is quoting two prophets, Isaiah (25:8) and Hosea (13:14) who also scoff at death. The prophets use *Sheol* as a synonym for *maveth* (death), just as Paul is here assimilating *thanatos* (death) to *Hadēs* and taunting them both. Paul's idea is that in the resurrection brought about by Jesus the ancient prophecies are fulfilled, and death is overcome...the point of Paul's only reference to *Hadēs* is to celebrate its impotence.²¹³

With regard to later Judaism Joachim Jeremias concludes, 'The fact that there were these different views as to which souls were in *Hadēs*, and for how long, meant that

²¹² Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 187.

²¹³ Alan Bernstein, *Death and Retribution in the Ancient and Early Christian Worlds* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 207.

there were great variations on this question in the Judaism of New Testament times'.²¹⁴ He sums up his extensive entry in Kittel by stating:

If the detailed conception of *Hadēs* in the New Testament is closely linked with contemporary views, these are basically altered by faith in Jesus and His resurrection...The Christian community also knows however, that Jesus is the Lord of *Hadēs*. This certainty which has its roots in the preaching of Jesus (Matthew 16:18) and in faith in His resurrection (Acts 2:31), is expressed in the doctrine of the descent to *Hadēs* in the time between the death of Christ and his resurrection.²¹⁵

Having examined this word, taking account of a range of scholarship, it can be claimed that *Hadēs* is mistranslated whenever it has been rendered 'Hell' in English Bibles. *Hadēs* is not the place where traditionalists argue the wicked are consigned to after death, commanded by God to experience endless punishment. This leaves *Gehenna* as the only New Testament word that could possibly equate to the traditional Christian idea of Hell as the place of endless punishment to which the unrepentant are consigned after death.

The word *Gehenna* (γέεννα) is used twelve times in the New Testament, eleven of which are attributed to Jesus. In the King James translation, every occurrence of the word is translated as Hell. Some of the more recent translations have '*Gehenna*' or '*Gei-Hinnom*' for some of the occurrences, although most still use the word Hell. In his discussion of *Gehenna*, Anthony Thisleton explains that *Gehenna* is actually a geographical location:

This was originally a place where Kings Ahaz and Manasseh of Judah condoned pagan worship, including child sacrifice (2 Kings 16:31; 23:10; Jeremiah 7:31; 32:35). But the term '*Gehenna*' does not appear in the Septuagint, and the Hebrew speaks only of 'the valley of Hinnom.' It is referred to three times in the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5:22, 29,30); in Matthew 10:28; and twice in the passage of

²¹⁴ Jeremias, Joachim. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel 'γέεννα' Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964. 148.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 149.

woes to the Pharisees (Matthew 23:15,33). The NRSV translates it as 'hell' or 'hell fire'...Augustinian tradition argues that this is about hell.²¹⁶

When Jesus is speaking of *Gehenna* he was referring to an actual geographical location, the valley of Hinnom, whereas when readers of English translations see *Gehenna* translated as Hell, they instinctively imagine the realm where unrepentant sinners are consigned to after death. John Walvoord speaking of *Gehenna* in *Four Views of Hell* states:

In this place human sacrifices were offered to Molech; these altars were destroyed by Josiah (2 Kings 23:10). The valley was later declared to be "the valley of slaughter" by Jeremiah (Jer. 7:30-33). The valley was used as a burial place for criminals and for burning garbage. Whatever its historical and geographic meaning, its usage in the New Testament is clearly a reference to the everlasting state of the wicked, and this seems to be the thought in every instance. In James 3:6 the damage accomplished by an uncontrolled tongue is compared to a fire which "corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."²¹⁷

Walvoord offers no rationale for his assertion that the use of *Gehenna* in the New Testament is clearly a reference to the everlasting state of the wicked. As the use of the word *Gehenna* by Jesus in the gospels is unprecedented, no such assumption can be made. The key question is what was originally meant by it not what centuries of tradition encourage us to assume its meaning is. There is no direct Old Testament usage of the word to guide us in this matter but Old Testament references to the valley of Hinnom are helpful in attempting to establish its meaning, as these verses indicate:

For the people of Judah have done evil in my sight, says the LORD; they have set their abominations in the house that is called by my name, defiling it. And they go on building the high place of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind. Therefore, the days are surely coming, says the LORD, when it will no more be called Topheth, or the valley of the son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter: for they will bury in Topheth until there is no more room. The corpses of

²¹⁶ Thistleton. *Life after Death*, 151-152.

²¹⁷ John Walvoord, Zachary Hayes, and Clark Pinnoch, *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1996), Kindle edition, Location 180, 200.

this people will be food for the birds of the air, and for the animals of the earth; and no one will frighten them away. Jeremiah 7:30-33

Topheth has been made ready for a long time. It is ready for the king. It was made very deep and wide. There is a very big pile of wood and fire there, and the LORD's breath will come like a stream of burning sulphur to start the fire. (Isaiah 30:33)

These texts and other similar passages make it clear that in Jewish culture the valley of Hinnom represented divine judgment and destruction. The high place of Topheth seems to have been the altar in the valley of Hinnom where the terrible sacrifices took place and so was a place of particular scorn and abhorrence. However, it is not until intertestamental times that there is any idea of the valley of Hinnom or *Gehenna* being the place of post-mortem punishment. Gregg emphasizes the importance of the intertestamental books such as 1 Enoch, in the development of this idea and the way in which these apocryphal writing influenced the meaning of important concepts such as *Gehenna* for later Judaism. As Gregg states:

Shortly before the time of Christ, certain Jewish writings (e.g. 1 Enoch) used the term *Gehenna* as a reference to the place of judgment for the wicked in the next world. The term never bore this meaning in the canonical Scriptures. Following the apocryphal writings, the rabbis began to speculate about the judgment of the damned, using *Gehenna* as the term for what we would call 'hell'. By the time of Christ, the term commonly carried this connotation, and was probably associated with this concept in the minds of many of Jesus' hearers. Even so, there was no unanimity among the rabbis as to the ultimate destiny of the wicked in *Gehenna*. Some thought that sinners who had not led others into sin would go to *Gehenna* for only twelve months, as a purging experience, after which they would go to the throne of God (*Babylonian Talmud* RH64)²¹⁸

It seems then that there was no uniform, undisputed understanding of the meaning of *Gehenna* in the time of Jesus, and therefore we cannot be certain of the sense in which he used it. In his entry for γέεννα in Kittel's dictionary, Jeremias supports the idea that the meaning of *Gehenna* when used by Jesus is uncertain:

²¹⁸ Gregg, *All You Want to Know about Hell*, 87.

It is significant that the oldest Rabbinic reference to *Gehenna* (Tosefta Sanhedrin 13,3 and parallel) tells us that the disciples of Shammai, as distinct from those of Hillel, ascribe to *Gehenna* a purgatorial as well as a penal character, namely...those whose merits and transgressions balance one another. It may be that this conception of a purificatory character of the final fire of judgment underlies such passages as Mark 9:49, 1 Corinthians 3:13-15, cf. 2 Peter 3:10.²¹⁹

Although Jeremias argues for caution, with regard to ascertaining the meaning of *Gehenna* in the New Testament, he does make some general claims concerning the nature of this important word which are relevant to this discussion:

In the New Testament there is no description of the torments of Hell as in apocalyptic literature. If they are mentioned, it is only to arouse consciences to fear of the wrath of the heavenly judge (Matthew 10:28 and parallel) ...The severity of the judgment of God on sin is expressed by Jesus in His threatenings of γέεννα even to disciples who wound their brothers with contemptuous words (Matthew 5:22). No sacrifice is too costly in the war against sin (Matthew 9:43 ff.).²²⁰

It seems that Jeremias is suggesting that even the terror texts of the Gospels are unlike some of the more lurid intertestamental literature, in that they are motivated by compassion and a desire to propagate the value of love of family and neighbour exemplified in the command of Jesus not to call our brother a fool (Matthew 5:22). Whilst acknowledging the possible influence of 1 Enoch and other intertestamental books on first century Jewish thought with regard to the nature of *Gehenna*, there is certainly not enough clarity or unanimity to establish that, when used in the teaching of Jesus, the word always meant the place of endless punishment of the wicked after death.

²¹⁹ Jeremias, Joachim. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel 'γέεννα' Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964. 658.

²²⁰ Ibid.

A number of commentators claim that, by the time of the New Testament, *Gehenna* was the rubbish tip outside of Jerusalem where there was a fire burning day and night. Rob Bell in his popular, but controversial book *Love Wins* states:

Gehenna, in Jesus' day, was the city dump. People tossed their garbage and waste into the valley. There was a fire there, burning constantly to consume the trash. Wild animals fought over the scraps of food along the edges of the heap. When they fought, their teeth would make a gnashing sound. Gehenna was the place with the gnashing of teeth, where the fire never went out.²²¹

This plausible, but unsubstantiated idea suggests that when Jesus uses Gehenna in his teaching, he is using it as a prophetic metaphor for what will happen to Israel if the nation does not accept the kingdom of God way of peacemaking which demands love for God, neighbour and enemy, including the Roman occupiers.

Beasley Murray and others challenge the city rubbish tip hypothesis, and point out the lateness of the emergence of this theory:

Ge-Hinnom (Aramaic Ge-hinnam, hence the Greek Geenna), 'The Valley of Hinnom,' lay south of Jerusalem, immediately outside its walls. The notion, still referred to by some commentators, that the city's rubbish was burned in this valley, has no further basis than a statement by the Jewish scholar Kimchi made about A.D. 1200; it is not attested in any ancient source." The valley was the scene of human sacrifices, burned in the worship of Moloch (2 Kings 16:3 and 21:6).²²²

However, Andrew Perriman in *Hell and Heaven in Narrative Perspective* supports the view that the *Gehenna* passages refer to the judgment of Israel, rather than the judgment of individuals at the end of time:

The "fire of Gehenna" (Matt. 5:22; 18:8-9) refers not to a universal hell but to the judgment that Jesus believed was coming upon Israel. It is an image of the massive destruction of life that would result from the Roman invasion of Judea and assault on Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 7:30-33; 19:6-8). Matthew 10:28 addresses the fears of the disciples in the same eschatological context. The image in Mark 9:48 of corpses being consumed in Gehenna by worms that do not die and a fire that cannot be quenched derives from Isaiah 66:24. The dead bodies of those who rebelled against YHWH serve as a perpetual reminder to the nations and to the returning exiles of the

²²¹ Rob Bell, *Love Wins: At the Heart of Life's Big Questions* (London: Collins, 2011), 68.

²²² George Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1986), 376-377.

judgment on Israel. But corpses, of course, do not feel pain. Jesus uses the image to similar effect: it forms part of his warning to the Jews of an analogous judgment to come.²²³

Jesus did prophecy the destruction of Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1-2) and Perriman points out that 'Josephus later describes how during the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans, corpses were thrown over the walls into the encircling valleys because there was no longer room to bury them in the city (Jos. War 5.12.3)'.²²⁴

N.T. Wright adds weight to this argument with his claim in *Jesus and the Victory of God*, that the judgment passages of the gospels are concerned with *pre-mortem* judgment of the nation of Israel within history rather than a post-mortem judgment of the world at the end of time:

When we read through the synoptic tradition (and John, for that matter) we find a great deal of warnings of coming judgment, in all strands of the traditions, and all pointing in one direction. Jesus, I shall now argue, predicted that judgment would fall on the nation in general, and on Jerusalem in particular. That is to say, he reinterprets a standard Jewish belief (the coming judgment which would fall on the nations) in terms of a coming judgment which would fall on impenitent Israel.... The story of judgment and vindication which Jesus told is very much like the story told by the prophet Jeremiah, invoking the categories of cosmic disaster in order to invest the coming socio-political disaster with its full theological significance. The 'normal' way of reading these passages within the Christian tradition has been to see them as references to a general post-mortem judgment in hell; but this betrays a fairly thorough lack of historical understanding²²⁵

What hearers understood by the word *Gehenna* when Jesus used it, and to what extent the intertestamental writings influenced their understanding, is proving to be difficult to ascertain. Fudge suggests that any idea can only be a matter of speculation:

Although the imagery of Gehenna becomes commonplace during this period, its actual function remains a matter of dispute. A few passages in the Pseudepigrapha, as well as one verse in the Apocrypha, specifically anticipate everlasting torment of conscious bodies and/or souls. Many other intertestamental passages portray the

²²³ Perriman, *Hell in Narrative Perspective*, Kindle edition, Location 265.

²²⁴ Ibid., 519.

²²⁵ N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: SPCK Publishing, 1996), 323.

consuming, unquenchable Old Testament fire that utterly destroys forever, leaving only smoke as a reminder of what once had been. To Jesus' first audiences, the word Gehenna certainly conveyed a sense of horror and disgust, but beyond that we must speak with extreme caution.²²⁶

To establish an authentic as possible understanding of the meaning of *Gehenna*, as used in the gospels, is very important to the strength of any case made by the proponents of the various views on Hell under consideration in this thesis. For the traditionalist, it is essential that *Gehenna* means the post-mortem place of endless conscious torment for the unrepentant. From the perspective of conditionalist, it is helpful to show that when Jesus uses *Gehenna*, he is speaking about post-mortem punishment, but that it is not necessarily endless or conscious. The restorationist case, which is that Hell is punitive but ultimately restorative, is less dependent on establishing the precise meaning of *Gehenna*. If it is used in a metaphorical sense by Jesus relating to the rubbish tip outside Jerusalem, as some would suggest, or used as a warning of impending judgment on the nation of Israel relating to the fall of Jerusalem, as other theologians suggest, the restorationist case is not challenged. The restorationist can also accommodate *Gehenna* as meaning the place of punishment after death, but would want to insist that the punishment is restorative rather than solely retributive which is the claim of the other two perspectives.

The idea that the *Gehenna* passages are prophetic judgments on the Jewish nation at the time of Jesus has credibility, as they appear only in the gospels and are only addressed to the Jewish community. If these passages were the teachings of Jesus with regard to the fate of all humanity, then it would be expected that the rest of

²²⁶ Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 118.

the New Testament would echo this concept. Verses such as Matthew 23:33 and 36 ‘You snakes, you brood of vipers! How can you escape being sentenced to Hell? (Gehenna) Truly I tell you, all this will come upon this generation’ add weight to this convincing hypothesis:

Seeing Gehenna as a reference to the slaughter of the Jews in AD 70 also provides a satisfying explanation to the otherwise perplexing fact that the fate of Gehenna is not threatened in any passage addressed to people other than first-century Palestinian Jews. If Gehenna refers to a post-mortem judgment of sinners, generally, why didn’t Peter or Paul ever make mention of it to those living outside Israel.²²⁷

Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson claim that Hell as endless punishment has a ‘prominent place in the biblical worldview.’²²⁸ They go on to articulate the classical argument for the traditional view of Hell:

Every New Testament author speaks of the reality of the future punishment of the wicked. And the Lord Jesus himself stands out as hell’s chief defender, neither Thomas Aquinas nor Jonathan Edwards ever spoke as fearsomely about the horrors of hell as Jesus did. Surely those of us who call Jesus “Lord” do not have the privilege of rejecting or neglecting a doctrine so explicit in Scripture and so emphatic in our Lord’s teachings. But Christians also must embrace and teach the doctrine of hell because of its prominent place in the biblical worldview.²²⁹

The claim of Morgan and Peterson is that Jesus stands out as Hell’s chief defender and that no one ever spoke as fearsomely about the horrors of Hell as he did. However, from the brief examination of the words used in the Bible, which are rendered Hell in English translations, none stand out as clearly meaning the Hell that Morgan and Peterson assert. Further, their claim that Hell has a prominent place in the biblical worldview, simply does not stand up to scrutiny. Not only is the

²²⁷ Gregg, *All You Want to Know About Hell*, 94.

²²⁸ Morgan, *Hell Under Fire*, 239.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

word Hell not used rarely in Scripture, but the traditional doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked is far from prominent in its pages.

The claim of traditionalists that the word *Gehenna*, when used by Jesus in the gospels, equates with the Hell of endless punishment associated with Christian orthodoxy, remains tenuous and unproven, as Perriman indicates:

Nothing that Jesus says about the punishment of Gehenna compels us to think that he is speaking of the afterlife, that he is describing a post mortem punishment rather than an ante mortem punishment. Jesus does not say that those who sin will be thrown into Gehenna after they have died.²³⁰

It is hoped that this chapter has made the case that there are robust alternative hermeneutical approaches with regard to the traditional view of Hell as the endless punishment of the wicked. The challenge to The Salvation Army is that, although there is clear evidence of doctrinal development within the denomination, we are still wedded to the normative doctrinal statement on Hell. Rowan Williams outlines the enormous value doctrinal development has been in the long history of the Church:

The history of doctrinal development could be described as a record of discarded solutions. Typically, a promising theory is advanced, explored, found wanting and left behind, with a legacy of terminological clarification and complexification to make the next round of discussion still more difficult. The definitions of the fourth and fifth centuries are not very stable compounds of these terminological experiments: a precariously balanced set of warnings and prescriptions, within whose boundaries we may expect to encounter the truth.²³¹

²³⁰ Perriman, *Hell and Heaven in Narrative Perspective*, Location 394.

²³¹ Williams, *Why Study History*, 42.

This helpful insight into the creative outcome of doctrinal development in the wider context of Church history, supports the continuation of doctrinal development within The Salvation Army and the expectation that careful theological reflection can lead to new considerations of the doctrine of endless punishment. Edward Fudge is a conservative evangelical and espouses a high view of Scripture and values his theological tradition. He is well aware of the long standing traditional view of Hell held amongst conservative evangelicals and the dominant place that the endless punishment of the wicked has occupied in the wider Church's doctrine of Hell throughout the centuries. However, he suggests that an authentic Protestant tradition is to critique tradition in the light of careful biblical scholarship:

It is a defining principle of the Reformation that ecclesiastical tradition, however good and wise, cannot provide the final word. That is Scripture's function, properly used, as N. T. Wright explains: The challenge of living with tradition is not so much . . . that one should let Scripture and tradition flow together straightforwardly into a single stream, but that tradition should be allowed to be itself; that is, the living voice of the very human church as it struggles with Scripture, sometimes misunderstanding it and sometimes gloriously getting it right. That is why the challenge comes fresh to each generation. Traditions tell us where we have come from. Scripture itself is a better guide as to where we should now be going.²³²

This chapter has presented a critical appraisal of The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell, as well as indicating valid alternative approaches to the biblical material on which it is based. It is my contention that Salvationists of this generation will be increasingly faced with the challenge to reflect with regard to the future of our doctrine of Hell and its place in the eleven articles of faith.

²³² Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 11.

Chapter 4 - The Salvation Army Doctrine of Hell and its Future

It is hoped that from this thesis it is clear that the pillars of a postmillennialist eschatology and a belief in the endless punishment of the wicked, both of which motivated the founders of The Salvation Army to engage in tireless mission, were built on questionable foundations. These interwoven pillars aimed at saving as many as possible from the spiritual destitution which would lead to an eternity of endless punishment in Hell, and at the same time rescuing the destitute from their very tangible hell on earth. The first generation of Salvationists believed that preaching and living out of this redemptive gospel would lead to the golden age of the thousand-year reign of Christ.

William Booth aimed at nothing less than the conversion of the entire world. Believing that Christian efforts, especially those of Salvationists, would help to usher in the millennium-the thousand-year reign of Christianity on earth-Booth's Army began to 'invade' a number of countries and colonies in the 1880's and this international growth only continued in the decades ahead.²³³

Although numerical growth did continue for some decades in the United Kingdom and still continues in some countries today, postmillennialism remained the idiosyncratic speculation of the first generation of leaders. It was never enshrined in any of our normative documents, and now remains only as a footnote in Salvation Army history to help us understand how strongly motivated the first Salvationists were to attempt to convert the whole world to Christianity.

In his chapter on Scripture and tradition in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, Kevin Vanhoozer says 'The vocation of the church is to

²³³ Eason, *Boundless Salvation*, 198.

embody Scripture in new contexts.’²³⁴ One of the goals of this thesis has been to explore alternative hermeneutical approaches to the doctrine of Hell as endless punishment. Discovering alternative approaches that can embody Scripture for The Salvation Army in its current context been the main motivation for undertaking this thesis. In the Protestant tradition from which The Salvation Army has been shaped, Scripture is foundational. The primary doctrine of the Salvationist movement states that, ‘We believe that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God and that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice.’²³⁵ Scripture was the source of our eleven articles of faith, but taken from a very specific foundationalist and propositional hermeneutical framework widely accepted by nineteenth century evangelicals. Kevin Vanhoozer, postulates an alternative approach that would harness Scripture as the authoritative source of a creative and compassionate activism:

Sola Scriptura returns then, not as positing the Bible as a text book filled with propositional information but by viewing the Bible as a script that calls for faithful yet creative performance. Scripture is the norm for the Christian way, truth and life, but only when Scripture is conceived as more than a handbook of propositional truths.²³⁶

This is a formidable challenge for a denomination which still has eleven articles of faith at its normative core. As mentioned in the discussion of alternative approaches to the nature of doctrine, Alister McGrath understands how deeply significant doctrine is, not only theologically, but with regard to social identity:

Doctrine is thus linked with the affirmation of the need for certain identity-giving parameters for the community, providing ideological justification for its continued

²³⁴ Vanhoozer, *Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, 164.

²³⁵ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 2010, xv.

²³⁶ Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 22.

existence. Doctrine thus defines communities of discourse. It does not merely structure the conceptual frameworks and specific modes of discourse of those communities; it identifies them as social entities, marking them off from other social groupings. It serves as a means of creating a sense of social identity, shaping the outlook of a community and justifying its original and continued existence in the face of rival communities with comparable claims. It assists in defining both the limits of, and the conditions for entering, such a community. Effective social cohesion requires the fixing of boundaries and the sense of community identity.²³⁷

It is clear that any debate with regard to changes in doctrine must be undertaken with great sensitivity and care. At the same time, we cannot ignore the growing discontinuity that is evident with regard to some long held dogmas. The world is a very different place today than when The Salvation Army began. The hugely significant societal changes that have taken place in the last one hundred and fifty years mean that many Salvationists will no longer simply accept an imposed dogma from anyone. Belief in a punishment that is endless is increasingly difficult today and the reasons for this are not limited to theological and philosophical reasons alone. Along with theological and philosophical developments that challenge this concept, the insights with regard to the reality of time and space gained from Einstein's theory of relativity and the field of quantum physics shed doubt on the evangelical 'certainties' of the nineteenth century with regard to what is meant by 'endless'. In his short and accessible book *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics*, Carlo Rovelli challenges the general perception of time and space which, before the age of modern physics, would have simply been accepted as fact:

The 'present' does not exist in an objective sense any more than 'here' exists objectively, but the microscopic interactions within the world prompt the emergence of temporal phenomena within a system (for instance, ourselves) that interacts only through the medium of a myriad of variables. Our memory and our consciousness are built on these statistical phenomena. For a hypothetical super-sensible being, there would be no 'flowing' of time; the universe would be a single block of past, present, and future. But due to the limitations of our consciousness

²³⁷ Alister McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine*, 38.

we only perceive a blurred vision of the world, and live in time. Borrowing words from my Italian editor 'what is non-apparent is much vaster than what is apparent'. From this limited, blurred focus we get our perception of the passage of time...Time sits at the centre of the tangle of problems raised by the intersection of gravity, quantum mechanics, and thermodynamics. A tangle of problems where we are still in the dark.²³⁸

Science and theology seem to agree that what is non-apparent is much vaster than what is apparent and that, even in the twenty first century, we are still surrounded by mystery. There is every reason for humility whichever discipline we are engaged in, and this critique of The Salvation Army doctrine of Hell has been offered knowing the reality of the Apostle Paul's insight that 'now we see through a glass darkly' (1 Corinthians 13:12). However, what has been gained from the research for this thesis, is an understanding that The Salvation Army doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked, whilst being a pillar of its missional motivation and activism, was built on very shaky foundations. The research undertaken has uncovered the weakness of this doctrine biblically, whilst recognising its powerful dominance in Church tradition over many centuries. What has also been recognised, particularly from the Ministerial Focussed Study element of this degree, is that the doctrine of endless punishment no longer has the motivational stimulus for mission and evangelism it once had. Whilst nearly all Salvationists in the United Kingdom today wholeheartedly embrace the concept that the whole of their life is to be a witness to the universal love of God for all humankind, there are very few who preach or teach Hell. Present day Salvationists have enormous admiration and

²³⁸ Carlo Rovelli, *Seven Brief Lessons on Physics* (London: Allen Lane, 2015), 60-61.

respect for the amazing energy and unselfish commitment of the early generations of Salvationists to the cause of rescuing as many as possible from Hell. However, for various reasons, many of them are no longer inspired and motivated by that same purpose. Therefore, we need to acknowledge plainly that the fear of Hell, either for ourselves or for others is no longer the motivation for mission. The case has been built that there is an increasing discontinuity between The Salvation Army doctrine of endless punishment and current belief and practice in the denomination. I have examined all of the handbooks of doctrine published alongside other relevant material, and have produced evidence that The Salvation Army has developed considerably in its understanding of eschatology. Official denominational teaching on the immortality of the soul, the general judgment at the end of the world and the endless punishment of the wicked has changed considerably over the years. Therefore, it is very difficult to imagine how, in the long term, The Salvation Army can continue to insist that all new members should publically witness to say, amongst other things, that they believe in the endless punishment of the wicked. Perhaps even more challenging is that all new officers must publically declare at their ordination and commissioning that they will uphold and teach this doctrine. The conclusion that I have reached as a result of the research undertaken in this study is that it is timely for The Salvation Army to reflect on the veracity of its doctrine of Hell.

The finding of this thesis is that the traditional case for the doctrine of the endless punishment of the wicked is nowhere near as certain as Augustine and traditionalists ever since have taught. For Augustine Hell was actual, severe,

endless, penal, just, ordained by God, and inscrutable.²³⁹ This was deduced from a very literal interpretation of a few biblical verses which many scholars have argued should never have been used to build a doctrine so alien to the thrust of Scripture which is that we have a God who loves humanity and is determined to transform us, restore us and reconcile us to himself. Christopher Date comments:

It should concern all bible students to note how few proof-texts can be cited in support of eternal torment, how much weight is placed on two texts from the Revelation to John (14:11; 20:10); and how other core texts come mainly from parables of Jesus. We are usually wary of interpreters who base their doctrines on proof-texts drawn from the Revelation, or from the parables of Jesus, without the control of didactic passages. It is hard to escape the conclusion that the theory of eternal torment stands on a very narrow exegetical base, and that the texts that control the interpretative grid are few, and come from the most symbolic of biblical books.²⁴⁰

However dubious the theological foundation of Augustine's doctrine of Hell, it has been all pervasive in its influence on the Church and the harshness of its conclusions has echoed down through the centuries. In the research for this thesis, it has not been possible to find any theological, biblical or philosophical argument for endless punishment that is compelling or even convincing. Traditionalists accuse those who disagree with their position of succumbing to an age of tolerance and of overemphasising the divine attributes of love and mercy. A counter argument is that those who emphasise the terror passages of wrath and destruction, do not take enough account of the passages of Scripture that are much more fundamental to the Christian faith:

We have, in any case, the two great commandments to love God with all our heart and to love our neighbour as ourselves. But suppose now that I am a proponent of exclusivism in theology and believe, however sincerely, that God himself despises (or even just fails to love) a group of humans whom he freely chooses not to include among his elect. For as long as I hold this belief, I will be unable to obey both of these

²³⁹ Hunsinger, *Disruptive Grace*, 233.

²⁴⁰ Date, *Rethinking Hell*, Location 3830

commandments. If I approve of a God who fails to love some of my neighbours (even though I know not which ones) and I am grateful for this fact, then I do not truly love or will the good for all of my neighbours; and if I do love them, then in the very act of willing the good for them I demonstrate my disapproval of any God who does not likewise will the good for them.²⁴¹

It has also been argued in this thesis that the Arminian theology adopted by The Salvation Army has been too anthropomorphic in its insistence that human freewill can ultimately thwart the sovereign will of God. Arminian theology together with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul has led to an almost inevitable need for an endless Hell. I have argued that the postliberal Barthian theology of election, which does not diminish in any way the sovereignty of God, nor the free choice of humankind is a far more biblical and reasonable soteriological approach:

Given a long enough stretch of time, evil will inevitably defeat itself; in the very nature of the case, that is its fundamental weakness. Although the Arminians are quite right to stress the importance of human freedom and choice, of choosing “this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15), it is hard to know what would even count as a free and irreversible choice to separate oneself from God forever. We can no more choose an irreversible destiny in the present, I contend, than we could have chosen to come into existence in the first place. We choose instead which path we shall follow today, and it is God who determines where that path ultimately leads.²⁴²

Some may argue that if The Salvation Army were to rethink its doctrine of Hell then there would be a devastating loss of missional motivation. However, this thesis has provided evidence that The Salvation Army in the United Kingdom has not, for some decades, found the motivation for its mission from rescuing people from a tortuous Hell. If, as is argued in this thesis, this prime motivator was an erroneous one, built on shaky foundations, then perhaps we should be honest enough to admit.

²⁴¹ Talbott, *The Inescapable Love of God*, 131.

²⁴² Ibid., 176-177.

Having examined the three main streams with regard to the nature of Hell found in Scripture, labelled in this thesis as traditionalism, conditionalism and restorationism, it is recommended that every Salvationist should be encouraged to examine the evidence for themselves. It has been argued in this thesis that Hell as endless punishment is the least substantiated view in Scripture. It has also been the contention of this study that traditionalism and conditionalism fail to take account of the ingenuity, compassion and determination of our eternal, missional God who is revealed in the particularity of Jesus Christ. However, the purpose of this research has not been to convince The Salvation Army to become a restorationist denomination, but simply a denomination that allows its members the freedom to choose between the valid biblical alternatives to the traditional view of Hell. If Salvationists were encouraged to engage in theological reflection on these three perspectives and embrace whichever was most convincing to them, this would be enormously motivating for a mission based on theological reflection rather than the constraints of a dogma instituted over one hundred and fifty years ago. The issues raised in this thesis inevitably leads us to question whether a Salvationist who no longer believes in the endless punishment of the wicked can still uphold and teach Salvation Army doctrine with integrity. Most of the eleven Salvationist articles of faith are reasonably broad and so allow for alternative interpretations. If Salvationists were free to embrace alternative interpretations with regard to doctrine eleven, this would be an encouragement to those who will not join or those who are considering leaving The Salvation Army because of their struggles with this doctrine.

Another possibility to be consider would be to change the word 'endless' to 'eternal' rather than removing the endless punishment element of doctrine eleven altogether. This would be a tentative but positive way forward to allow a rethinking of our doctrine of Hell for those who can no longer believe or teach the traditional doctrine. As has been discussed the word eternal, translated from the Greek word *aiónios*, is a quality word with reference to the divine. Eternal punishment is the quality of punishment which God assigns and therefore, those convinced of a conditionalist or restorationist view could uphold the doctrine with integrity. The phrase 'endless punishment' is difficult from a conditionalist perspective as it understands annihilation as the once and for all final punishment. For restorationists the word endless is even more problematical in that it does not allow for the punishment to ever restore humanity and bring the reconciliation that all Christians hope for. The replacement of 'eternal' with 'endless' in doctrine eleven would allow Salvationists who are more convinced of the conditionalist or restorationist case the freedom to live with the integrity of their convictions. It would also allow those still convinced of the traditionalist case to interpret the doctrine as they always have done. It is interesting that in the wording of doctrine eleven used before the 1922 Handbook the word endless is always used, whilst in the 1922 edition²⁴³ the word everlasting replaces endless. By the time of the 1935 handbook, the word has reverted to endless. Although endless and everlasting are synonymous, it does at least indicate that it is possible to change words in Salvationist doctrine. A change from 'endless' to 'eternal' which allows for an

²⁴³ The Salvation Army, *Handbook of Doctrine*, 1922, 2.

alternative understanding of the duration and nature of the punishment which the 'wicked' will receive, would allow lay members and officers to embrace the eleventh doctrine with more integrity.

Another contention of this thesis is that the mission of The Salvation Army would be well served if Salvationists were encouraged to engage in thoughtful theological reflection on the issues surrounding what motivated our mission initially and what motivates it today. This in turn would encourage The Salvation Army to enjoy continuity between its normative, formal, espoused and operant theological voices, as it did in the early generations of the denomination. It is clear that the evangelism and wider mission of The Salvation Army was clearly focussed on the salvation of the world as is evident from this passage from *Boundless Salvation* stresses:

As William and Catherine Booth's Christian Mission evolved into The Salvation Army in the late 1870's, its theological mandate became all the more apparent to the wider world. Here was an organisation framed explicitly around the central doctrine of the Bible, salvation. Here was an organisation claiming rather boldly to specialize in the redemption of the entire world. There was, simply put, no room for confusion about its purpose for existence. Salvation was at the core of the Army's identity, as William Booth articulated so clearly several months after the Christian Mission changed its name: 'We are a salvation people, this is our speciality, getting saved and keeping saved, and then getting somebody else saved, and then getting ourselves saved more and more until full salvation on earth makes heaven within.' Booth's nascent Army was forged out of an optimistic and comprehensive soteriological vision, one that aimed at nothing less than the transformation of nation after nation.²⁴⁴

This soteriological vision did galvanise the early generations of Booth's followers, but has failed to motivate Salvationists in recent decades. It is time to allow the reflective theological process of establishing a renewed eschatological orthodoxy, one which listens to the operant theological voices which are reflected in our current practice.

²⁴⁴ Eason, *Boundless Salvation*, 41.

It was not only a postmillennial eschatology and a strong belief in Hell that motivated the first generation of Salvationists, it was also the pursuit of social justice, especially amongst the very poorest in society. This conviction, which has always been a characteristic of Salvationism, is much more widely supported throughout Scripture than either postmillennialism or the existence of a literal Hell. It is interesting that it is our continued commitment to this conviction that The Salvation Army is still most widely known for today. Postmillennialism has not been a motivating factor in Salvationist mission since the first generation and the findings of this thesis is that rescuing people from a tortuous Hell has been in decline as a motivation for mission for many decades, but our passion for social justice shines as brightly as ever.

The Salvation Army, like many other Christian denominations in the United Kingdom, is in numerical decline. However, a return to the beliefs that motivated such amazing missional success in the mid and late nineteenth century, are untenable today. A return to numerical growth may, or may not be possible in the future, but this should not deter Salvationists from their mission. This mission is what unites us with every other Christian community. The Anglican Communion sums this up succinctly in its five marks of mission:

- To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom.
- To teach, baptize and nurture new believers.
- To respond to human need by loving service.
- To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation.
- To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ Anglican Witness accessed September 9, 2015. <http://www.anglicanwitness.org/five-marks-of-mission/>

These five marks embody what Salvationists, at their best, have lived faithfully as they have been fully immersed (baptized) in living out and teaching the richness of life in the Kingdom of God. Proclaiming the gospel, serving suffering humanity, fighting for justice, encouraging human flourishing, pursuing reconciliation in families and communities, and speaking up against the ravaging of the natural resources of our planet that pollutes, poisons and destroys communities and the rich ecology of planet earth, all resonate with the Salvationist ethos. The five marks of mission represents a theologically robust purpose and missional motivation for The Salvation Army in the twenty first century. The Hell fixated mission of the first generations, whilst effective, was always theologically problematic. This theological framework was incapable of sustaining The Salvation Army in the long term. Whilst Arminian theology, with its tendency towards an anthropomorphic soteriology, did encourage Salvationists to see that they had a part to play in the transformation of the world, it did not recognize that the passion of the *Missio Dei* would eventually assure the reconciliation of all things in Christ (Colossians 1:20). I am encouraged that the evidence of this this thesis indicates that there has been considerable doctrinal development amongst Salvationists through the years and that many are already living beyond the motivating force of the doctrine of Hell as endless punishment. Perhaps all along we should have had more confidence in our missionary creator, who does not separate the 'sheep' and the 'goats' forever, but brings them all home eventually. Mary Catherine Hilkert eloquently encapsulates the findings of this thesis when she says:

Every human being is endowed with radical dignity, every aspect of humanity as created by God shares in the human potential to image the divine. As fundamentally

social and relational beings, we image God most profoundly when our human relationships, our families and communities, and our social, political, economic and ecclesiastical structures reflect the equality, mutuality and love that are essential to the Trinitarian God revealed in Jesus and in communities living in the power of his Spirit.²⁴⁶

Finally, I believe that The Salvation Army can be inspired to move beyond the misplaced motivational force of its doctrine of Hell. Motivated and empowered by the Trinitarian God, who endows all humankind with radical dignity, we have the enormous privilege to be an army of salvation, ready to live out and speak out the gospel of Christ which is unconditionally good news for all humanity.

²⁴⁶ Mary C. Hilbert, "Cry Beloved Image-Rethinking the Image of God" in *In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology* ed. Ann O. Graff. (Maryknoll: Orbis books, 1995), 203.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 A Questionnaire on Belief and Practice in the Salvation Army

Age, please tick a box 20-30 ☐ 31-40 ☐ 41-50 ☐ 51 and over ☐

Gender: female ☐ Male ☐

How long have you been associated with the Salvation Army: under 5 years ☐ 5 – 10 years ☐
11 – 20 years ☐ 21 – 30 years ☐ 31 – 40 years ☐ Over 41 year ☐

Are you: staff ☐ student ☐ Member of a Salvation Army congregation ☐

Please circle on a scale of zero to five where one is not at all and five is profoundly indicating how much you believe the following doctrinal statements:

We believe...

that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God 0 1 2 3
4 5

that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice. 0 1 2 3 4 5

there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things 0 1 2 3 4 5

who is the only proper object of religious worship 0 1 2 3 4 5

that there are three persons in the Godhead-the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory 0 1 2 3 4 5

that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man 0 1 2 3 4 5

that our first parents were created in a state of innocence, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness 0 1 2 3 4 5

that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God 0 1 2 3 4 5

that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved 0 1 2 3 4 5

that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation 0 1 2 3 4 5

that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself 0 1 2 3 4 5

that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ 0 1 2
3 4 5

that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the immortality of the soul; 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the resurrection of the body 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the general judgment at the end of the world 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the eternal happiness of the righteous 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the endless punishment of the wicked 0 1 2 3 4 5

Please circle on a scale of zero to five where one is not at all and five is profoundly indicating what impact these doctrinal statements have on your daily life as a follower of Jesus:

that the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments were given by inspiration of God 0 1 2 3 4 5

that they only constitute the Divine rule of Christian faith and practice. 0 1 2 3 4 5

there is only one God, who is infinitely perfect, the Creator, Preserver, and Governor of all things 0 1 2 3 4 5

who is the only proper object of religious worship 0 1 2 3 4 5

that there are three persons in the Godhead-the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, undivided in essence and co-equal in power and glory 0 1 2 3 4 5

that in the person of Jesus Christ the Divine and human natures are united, so that He is truly and properly God and truly and properly man 0 1 2 3 4 5

that our first parents were created in a state of innocency, but by their disobedience they lost their purity and happiness 0 1 2 3 4 5

that in consequence of their fall all men have become sinners, totally depraved, and as such are justly exposed to the wrath of God 0 1 2 3 4 5

that the Lord Jesus Christ has by His suffering and death made an atonement for the whole world so that whosoever will may be saved 0 1 2 3 4 5

that repentance towards God, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit, are necessary to salvation 0 1 2 3 4 5

that we are justified by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and that he that believeth hath the witness in himself 0 1 2 3 4 5

that continuance in a state of salvation depends upon continued obedient faith in Christ 0 1 2 3 4 5

that it is the privilege of all believers to be wholly sanctified, and that their whole spirit and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the immortality of the soul 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the resurrection of the body 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the general judgment at the end of the world 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the eternal happiness of the righteous 0 1 2 3 4 5

In the endless punishment of the wicked 0 1 2 3 4 5

Thank you so much for participating in this anonymous questionnaire.

Appendix 2. Graph Indicating Belief in the 18 Doctrinal Statements amongst Students, Staff and Congregation Members:

